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# CULTURAL UNITY OF INDIA

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by  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE HOMELAND

The Indian homeland has been described countless times by *rishis* and poets, by historians, and by travellers from far-off places. They have sung of its mighty mountains, its tall, dark forests, its tangled jungles where tigers and elephants roam, its majestic rivers, its fertile valleys and plains, its palm-fringed shores washed by the three oceans. *Bharat Mata*, symbol of the land we love, stands with feet delicately poised at the southern tip of the Peninsula, arms outstretched towards the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, head proudly lifted among the snowy Himalayas. She is the Motherland from whom her children draw their sustenance, and to whom they joyously give back their hearts' warm devotion and love.

What sort of a land is this Motherland ? As countries of the world go, the Indian Union is a large country. It has an area of 1,261,597 square miles. From Kashmir to Cape Comorin it is 2,000 miles long, and nearly 1,850 miles across from Kutch to Assam. But six countries are still larger, two in Asia, three in the New World and one in the Pacific Ocean. They are the Soviet Union (eight times larger than India), China, Canada, the United States, Brazil and Australia. But in population India stands second only to China. India, according to the 1961 census, has a population of well over 439,000,000. From the standpoint of both land area and population, therefore, India is one of the really important countries of the world.

When the Indian sub-continent became free after centuries of political subjugation, on August 15, 1947, less than two decades ago, by mutual agreement and consent among erstwhile brothers the Indian family property was divided. Parts of old India were cut away to form another independent country, Pakistan. Thus new frontiers suddenly came into existence. India's sea frontiers, shortened by 650 miles, now have a total length of 3,535 miles. The land frontiers, on the other hand, have been extended to a length of 9,425 miles. The complex Indo-Pakistan frontier, of 2,600 miles, takes into account the two blocs of West Pakistan

and East Pakistan, separated from each other by nearly a thousand miles of intervening Indian territory.

The new status of independence also required a reshaping of the country's political structure. British India was interlaced with a great number of semi-independent Indian States that were ruled by princes under the advice of the paramount power. Left in that condition, India would have been hopelessly weak. With a wonderful spirit of co-operation, the princes abdicated their autocratic power overnight in the interests of a strong and united India. Today, the Indian Union consists of sixteen States, and nine Centrally-administered territories. Delhi continues to be the all-India capital.

Of India's land frontier, the longest stretch is the border with China. The border runs roughly 2,400 miles, from west to east, across difficult mountain regions. North of Kashmir, India is bounded by the Muztagh, the Aghil and the Kuenlun mountains. For the rest she is bounded by the Himalayas except in the Nepal region. She is adjoined in the north by China and Nepal. In the east lies East Pakistan surrounded by the States of West Bengal and Assam and the Union Territory of Tripura. In the north-west, West Pakistan and Afghanistan border on India.

In the south, the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait separate India from Ceylon. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal and the Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands in the Arabian Sea are parts of the territory of India.

So much for the outline of the Indian map. But we do not love a map. We love our mountains and rivers, our villages and towns, our wide flat plains, the winding paths along which, morning and evening, the pearl-coloured village cows and blue-black buffaloes pass, the cool shade of the mango groves in the hot season, the oncoming monsoon, refreshing the parched land and reviving the drooping spirits of man and beast, the yellowing rice-fields, with their promise of a full harvest.

Nature often parcels out her wealth as if she were limited to only one sort of building material. She either builds a land all mountains and rocky coast, or makes an arid desert of blistering sands. She scatters her coral islets, like stepping-stones, fanning them with languid breezes. But to India she has given something of everything. All her treasures, in endless variety and

unstinted measure, she has poured out to fashion this blessed land.

Bounded by mountains and seas, India was created by Nature a natural geographical unit. In the far north stretch the Himalayas, mightiest mountains of the world. Other lesser ranges, in the central and west-central parts of the country, are the Vindhya Mountains and the Aravalli, Satpura and Ajanta Hills. The Vindhyas form a convenient dividing line between the Northern Plains and the Deccan Plateau. Down both sides of the Peninsula, but leaving coastal strips with numerous harbours and ports, run the Western and Eastern Ghats. In the south rise the Nilgiris. But the Himalayas are India's mountains of destiny.

This vast wall has a length of over 1,500 miles and is bastioned with hundreds of peaks more than twenty thousand feet high. Difficult and hazardous passes penetrate it here and there, and over these, in centuries past, the Indo-Aryans first came down from the Steppes of Central Asia—or it may be the Anatolian Uplands—to settle in the plains of Northern India. Over the mountains, too, hardy traders carried their goods, and Buddhist missionaries their religion of love and peace. In later times, marauders often enough swept down through the passes to ravage the fertile Indian plains. Nevertheless, the Himalayas have always stood as a mighty rampart of protection, behind which, through slow centuries India built up her distinctive culture and her own unique civilization.

To the Himalayas India also owes the salient features of her climate as well as her principal river-systems. The moisture-laden south-west monsoon, blowing regularly in from the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea towards the middle of June, moves northward over the Peninsula, depositing its life-giving rain. When it reaches the Himalayas, the massive barrier checks its further advance, thus conserving the major part of the rain for India. In three months, India thus receives nine-tenths of her annual rainfall. The Himalayan wall also saves India from the icy blasts which sweep down from the Arctic region and across Siberia and Central Asia during the winter months. Even the birds of Asia fly south at the approach of the cold weather to enjoy the more equable Indian climate.

More than any other country in the world, perhaps, is India favoured by the number and size of her rivers. Rivers served as

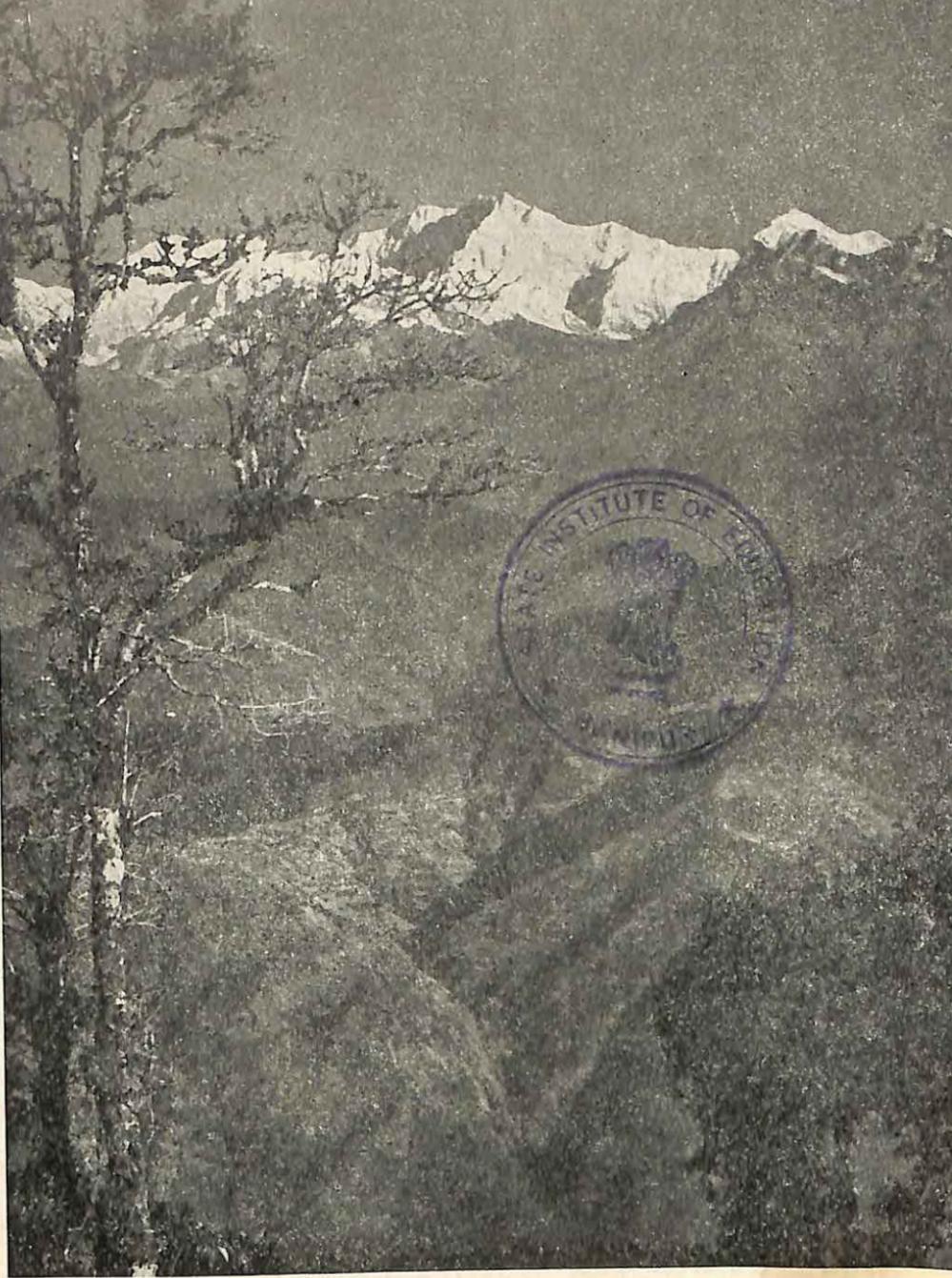
the ancient highways of navigation and commerce, linking the great cities on their banks and the ports at their mouths from which Indian ships sailed bravely away to distant lands long before charts and instruments to sail by were known. And the rivers (together with lakes, storage tanks and wells), of course, have always sustained the agricultural population of India, which depends on them for its prosperity. Fortunately, each separate part of the country, except Rajasthan, has its own great river-system.

The Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, all rising in the Western Himalayas, are many hundreds of miles long, and all have innumerable branches and tributaries. The Indus is pre-eminently the river of the North-west, the Ganga of the Northern Plains, and the Brahmaputra, after completing its long journey across Tibet, of Assam and East Pakistan. The Indus pours itself into the Arabian Sea, the other two empty into the Bay of Bengal. Though the Ganga and her twin sister, the Yamuna, are looked upon as holy rivers, it was the Indus that was first associated with Indian history.

The five tributaries or affluents of the Indus—Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—are the five rivers which gave the “land of the five rivers” its name—the Punjab. To the Indus, India owes her name. The Vedic Aryans called the great river of the North-west *Sindhu*. Their neighbouring Iranian cousins changed this to *Hindu*, while the “country-of-the-river” became *Hindustan*. For *Hindu*, the Greeks next substituted *Indos*, which the Romans in their turn modified to *Indus*. *Indus* has finally remained as the name of the river, while the whole country has become *India*.

The Deccan and South India also have their great rivers. The Narbada and the Tapti, rising respectively in the Vindhya and the Aravalli Hills, flow westward across the Deccan into the Gulf of Cambay. The Mahanadi, the Godavari and the Krishna flow east into the Bay of Bengal. Still farther south flow the Pennar and the Kaveri.

India's unlimited water resources, if properly developed are easily capable of supplying all the irrigation needs of the country, as well as power for industrial development. But soil erosion and the devastating annual floods resulting from the progressive deforestation of mountain slopes have first to be controlled. This



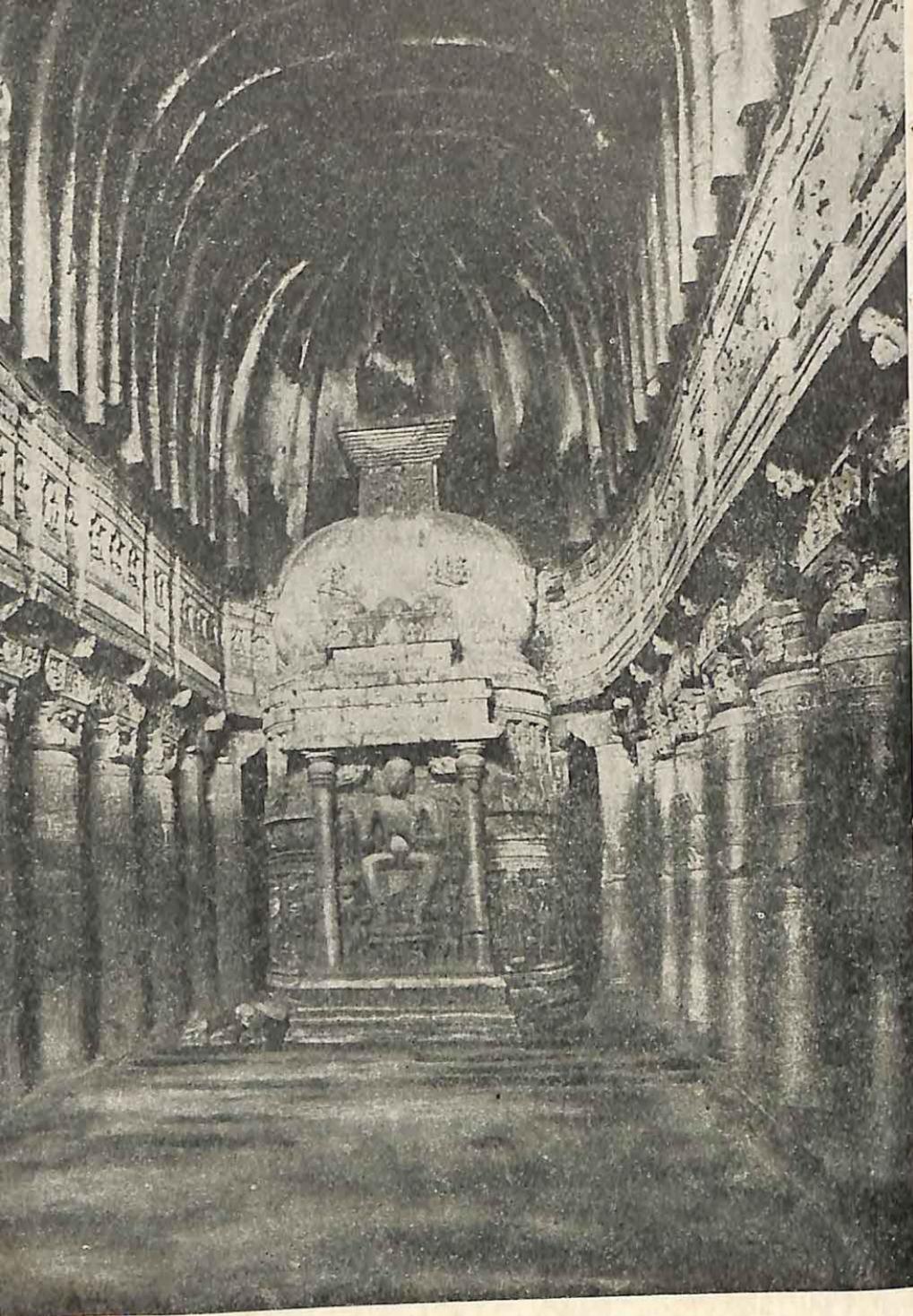
*Kanchenjunga (28,168 ft.) in the Eastern Himalayas,  
the third highest peak in the world*



*Naga tribesmen*

*Head of the Buddha*  
Graeco-Buddhist School of Gandhara (circa 4th century A.D.)





*Rock-cut Chaitya Hall, Cave No. XXVI  
Ajanta, Deccan (7th century A.D.)*

is why New India is feverishly engaged in building a score or more of giant multi-purpose river projects—to control erosion and floods, to give perennial irrigation to millions of acres of land, to provide cheap navigation, and to generate hydro-electric power on a vast scale.

Yet it is interesting to know that ancient Indian rulers also understood the need of harnessing rivers, constructing dams and embankments and digging canals. A pre-Sanskrit inscription from Orissa, the ancient Kalinga, probably belonging to the second century B.C., describes the virtues of King Kharavela, who is praised for having "renovated and extended" certain old canals". The earliest known Sanskrit inscription of India, of a period equivalent to 150 A.D., also relates, strangely enough, to irrigation. This inscription is at Girnar in Saurashtra, and refers to a reservoir originally excavated in the fourth century B.C. by a provincial governor of Chandragupta, the first emperor of the Maurya dynasty. A second inscription states that this reservoir was later enlarged, and was kept in repair for eight hundred years.

Though rivers form a natural means of easy communication and integration between different parts of the country, roads are no less important. Ancient India was criss-crossed by several great trunk roads. One, which connected in the far North-west with caravan routes to Central Asia, Iran and China proceeded from Kabul by way of Peshawar, Taxila, Sakala (Sialkot), Kanauj, Prayag (Allahabad) and Kasi (Banaras) to Pataliputra (Patna), the capital of the great Mauryan Empire. From there it continued on to Tamluk, the ancient seaport of Bengal. A second main road started from Kapilavastu near the Nepal border, where the Buddha was born in the sixth century B.C. and passed on to Ayodhya (the city of Rama), Kausambi and Vidisa (Besnagar, near Bhilsa) in Central India; it then proceeded to Ujjain, where it turned south and after crossing the Deccan ended at Madurai, the capital of the ancient Pandyan kingdom. Still another road started from Bengal and connected with the western seaports.

Chandragupta's famous minister, Kautilya, says that the Mauryan royal road was 64 feet wide and was lined with shady trees and provided with rest-houses and wells for the comfort of travellers. Towns and villages through which it passed had to maintain

it in good condition and fines were imposed on anyone caught damaging the road or causing obstruction to traffic. Chandragupta's grandson, the great Asoka, as we know from his stone edicts, bestowed equal attention upon the roads of the Empire in the third century B.C.

Road building in India is receiving renewed attention today, and the vast schemes being carried out all over the country include not only national highways and State district roads, but, for the first time, village-level roads as well. Eighty-three per cent of the Indian people live in 550,000 small villages. Hitherto, the villages were deprived of most of the amenities of modern life, and have had very limited economic outlets for their produce. The new roads will integrate the villages with cities and materially raise the standard of living in rural areas. No wonder the villages are coming forward in their thousands to give their labour voluntarily for the construction of the new roads.

The country is also integrated by its modern railways, telegraph system, radio and air-planes. The earliest railway in India, from Bombay to Poona, was laid well over a century ago, exactly twenty-eight years after Great Britain had built the first railway in the world. India's nationalized railway system, already covering over 35,000 miles, is being further expanded. All the principal towns and cities are now connected by regular day and night air services operated by the nationalized Indian Airlines.

Thus, apart from Nature's gift of a basic geographical unity, man-made channels of communication have also helped in unifying the Indian homeland.

## CHAPTER II

### WE THE PEOPLE

We, the people of the Indian homeland, stand for the sum of all that our ancestors living here through ages past have thought and done. We are also, in part, the product of influences and pressures exerted from outside. Many and varied, therefore, are the strands out of which the fabric of our national life has been woven.

Other nations have a history as long as India's perhaps, but where is the continuity between the past and the present? Do the Egyptians of today in any way resemble their ancestors who built the Great Pyramids? The Chinese in their hurry, or so it seems, to learn the modern language of material advancement are now in the process of repudiating what once made their civilization illustrious in the eyes of the world. Where are Sumer and Chaldea and Babylon, old contemporaries of India? Where are the glories even of the younger Greece and Rome? We gaze curiously at fragments of their broken vases and other remnants of their dead civilizations, neatly ticketed in museums.

But with a strange vitality, India lives. After each devastating wave of conquest, the people have somehow risen again, their inner life miraculously intact. Does this mean that changes have never come through the centuries or that Indian life is fossilized, like the shells found high up on the Himalayas, carried there millions of years ago when a vast continental pressure first squeezed the primeval ooze of the ocean-bed into the folds of gigantic mountains? On the contrary, the secret of Indian vitality lies in its wonderful capacity to tolerate different views, different customs, different levels of understanding. If "nothing in excess" was the motto of ancient Greece, "diversity in unity" or "unity in diversity" has always been the motto of India.

So here we are, the people of India, born of the many vicissitudes of a long history, each of the many strands adding its own special note of colour, or a sudden flash of gold, to the intricate pattern of the national life. Even before recorded history began, dimly understood migrations of human beings had begun

to pour their streams into India. The process has gone on even up to quite modern times, though with an ever diminishing force. Out of this background emerges our multi-coloured population, with its race mixtures, its various languages, its groups at all stages of social evolution—yet all knowing no other home than India. "We the people" includes them all.

Side by side with the rest of us are no fewer than 10,000,000 members of the so-called primitive tribes. Most of them live in a broad belt of Central India stretching across Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Others are found in Assam, or in the remoter Himalayas, and still others in odd pockets scattered through the Deccan and South India, and, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of the Bay of Bengal.

Few of the tribal people have any written language. Their dialects are Austric, Kolarian, Munda or Tibeto-Burman in origin, or represent adaptations of Aryan or Dravidian languages spoken by the people who now live on either side of them. The strength of their tribal organizations is what has permitted them to survive in a totally different kind of world. The men are warriors in the all but forgotten sense of the word, depending on their own personal skill and bravery to defend themselves against the tigers and other wild beasts who haunt their forest clearings. They practise a make-shift agriculture. Their wants are few, and they have a wholesome scorn for the clap-trap of modern civilization. Their lives are not out of balance, with the forces of nature surrounding them. They are hardy, simple, truthful, child-like. The Naga warriors of Assam, when invited to take part in the National Independence Festival at Delhi, win the highest applause from the onlookers. Their vivid dancing brings to life memories of the remote past of all mankind.

Searching for ancient roots, we also remember Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley Civilization of five thousand years ago. Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, the two best known sites of the ancient city civilization of North-west India, have now passed to Pakistan, but Rupar lies in the Simla Hills, and other associated sites have been discovered as far west as Saurashtra and possibly as far south as Rajasthan.

The ancient cities reveal the earliest municipal planning known to the world. The streets were straight, crossing each other at rigid right angles. The houses were of burnt brick, many

of them provided with private bath-rooms, which were connected, by means of chutes inset in the walls, with the municipal drainage system. There were large public bathing-tanks, or pools. The people were evidently prosperous traders and agriculturists, though their utensils were still of stone, copper or bronze. They could read and write, as we know from the numerous carved seals which have been found at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. These seals bear a pictographic script and finely carved representations of animals, such as tigers, elephants, buffaloes and the typical Indian humped bull. One of the seals shows a Siva\*-like deity sitting cross-legged in the familiar Indian posture of meditation. (The pair of horns he wears might easily have been transformed at some later period into a crescent moon.) The Indus people also worshipped animals and snakes, tree-spirits, and above all a Mother Goddess.

The origin, race, language and script of the Indus city-builders are still wrapped in mystery, but the people are known to have had some kind of relationship with Sumer in Mesopotamia. At the same time, the resemblances between their civilization and the ancient Dravidian civilization of South India are sufficiently marked for scholars to have tentatively bestowed the name Proto-Dravidian on the Indus people. It is indeed impossible to believe that the mysterious city-builders of the North-west never had any connection with the rest of India, and left no trace behind, when they disappeared from view about the middle of the second millennium B.C. However, recent researches in pre-history are beginning to indicate that such is not the case.

Indians today are chiefly a blend of two major racial strains. The separation of races has long ceased, but that it once existed is evident from the fact that Dravidian languages are spoken by at least a quarter of the Indian people today, and Aryan languages by practically all the rest. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu, Dravidian in origin, are the languages of South India and the Deccan. The languages of North India and Maharashtra, namely, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese, on the other hand, are all Aryan. So is Sanskrit,

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\*The international phonetic spelling has been adopted, but without diacritical marks, in the use of such words as Shiva, Shaivite, Shyama Vaishya, etc., hence Siva, Saivite, Syama and Vaisya.

of course. How the two races met and fused, producing a living and unified culture, is the story of India itself.

It used to be taken for granted that the Dravidians had not only always been in India, but had once spread over the whole country. Then the conquering Aryans are supposed to have come and pushed them into the South. A different view has come to be held since the connection between the Indian Dravidians and the great family of Mediterranean peoples was brought to light.

Long before iron was known in North India, the Dravidians of South India were making and using iron weapons and tools. This knowledge of iron distinguishes their culture from the Stone Age culture which preceded it. The Dravidians also built Megalithic tombs in the form of stone circles, menhirs and dolmens (all containing objects of iron) which have been found scattered in enormous numbers over the Deccan and the South. From this stage, the Dravidians swiftly evolved into a highly civilized people.

That the very early Dravidian people shared their knowledge of iron, at least with the people then living in the Sinai Peninsula at the head of the Red Sea, has been amply proved by recent excavations in that area, which have uncovered what are believed to be the oldest iron mines so far known in the world. Megalithic remains strikingly similar to and probably considerably older than those of India are also abundant in the Mediterranean region. These are totally missing in North India, except for a few traces near Karachi. Iron remained unknown in North India until long after it had come into common use in the South. These are the findings which seem to indicate that the typical early Dravidian culture probably never flourished north of the Vindhyas at all, but had a definite link with the Mediterranean countries, and from there spread to the coastal areas in-between.

Did the Dravidians then enter India from outside? No final answer can be given. All that can be said is that the similarities between the Mohenjo-daro culture, the ancient culture of Crete, and the early Dravidian culture of South India seem to be links in a chain. Still another link is the otherwise inexplicable presence in Baluchistan of a tribe known as the Brahuis who speak a Dravidian dialect to this day, though they are separated

from the Dravidians of South India by more than a thousand miles, bear no racial resemblance to them, and have had no known contact with them in historical times.

The most important event in Indian cultural history, however, is certainly the Aryan advance into North India, perhaps 4,000 years ago. About the same time when the nomad Aryan herdsmen in search of grazing-lands were coming down into India in successive waves, other Aryan tribes were fanning out with explosive energy from the same mysterious centre in Asia towards Iran and Europe. This is the picture reconstructed from our knowledge of the fact that the North Indian, Iranian, Russian and European languages of today all belong to the same Indo-European family group, having a basically similar syntax and related vocabularies. But the archaic Sanskrit of the ancient Indic Aryans (miraculously preserved in the *Vedas*) is the oldest surviving Aryan language.

The hymns of the *Rigveda* reveal the religious and deeply speculative ideas of the Indic Aryans, and also a great deal about themselves, their appearance, and their activities. Mainly a pastoral people, accompanied by their honoured tribal priests, they moved on across a hostile frontier land. Some of the hymns name rivers, identifiable with the present-day rivers of eastern Afghanistan. Fierce conflicts occurred between the invaders and the people already in possession of the land, and the setting of the earliest conflicts is clearly North-west India, particularly the Punjab. Who the dispossessed original inhabitants were we do not know, but they may have been tribes not unlike those still living in Central India and the Himalayas. The Aryans called them *Dasas* or *Dasyus* (slaves), or by tribal names, and contemptuously described them as black-skinned, noseless, malignant, and non-sacrificing, in contrast to themselves, who were tall and fair, with prominent noses. The *Dasyus* nevertheless had a hundred walled forts, broad and wide, made of stone, and strong as metal. Indra, the chief of the Aryan gods, became the mighty "destroyer of forts". Was it Indra, then, who was responsible for destroying the last of the Indus cities?

The victorious Aryans continued to advance, sometimes making alliances of friendship with the defeated chieftains of enemy tribes. Aryan settlements, at first isolated, gradually grew into compact areas. Great Aryan kingdoms arose, described in detail

in the Puranic and Epic literature. From Aryavarta, the country between the upper Yamuna and the Ganga, these kingdoms spread eastwards to Bihar and southwards to the Vindhya. And at last the Aryans ruled the whole of North India.

The peaceful penetration of South India was already simultaneously progressing. The Aryan conquest of the Dravidian South was essentially a spiritual and intellectual conquest. Aryan *rishis* and teachers carried with them not only the Vedic wisdom and the Sanskrit language in which it was enshrined, the knowledge of the Aryan gods and the sacred rituals of their worship, but that poetic, imaginative and questing spirit which the first sight of the snow clad Himalayas and the rushing rivers of the Indian Northland had awakened in their ancestors long, long ago. The Dravidians accepted what the Aryans brought and an inexorable mingling of the two civilizations began. Dravidian gods and goddesses, Dravidian ideas and customs, also passed into the Aryan stream. Every Hindu Indian of today, whether he is aware of it or not, is a product of this exchange and ultimate fusion of cultures.

In the great amalgam of Indian peoples accommodation had also to be made for later invaders. In the thousand-year period between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D., Persians, Greeks, Sakas, Kushans and Huns all succeeded in forcing their way into India by precisely the same route over which the ancient Aryans had travelled. They overran the North-west and either detached it from the rest of India by temporarily adding it to some empire of their own, as Darius did when he made it the twentieth satrapy of the Persian Empire, or they set themselves up as local rulers in the Punjab, like the Asiatic Greeks of Bactria, and the Pahlavas and the Sakas, or like the Kushans, they made Gandhara the focal point for a great new northern empire—half Indian, half Central Asian—or else, descending upon India as wanton looters, like the Huns, they departed, satiated, of their own accord. All such invasions were of a temporary nature, and their force was invariably spent in one, two, or three centuries at most. In the end, practically all of these foreigners had become so thoroughly Indianized, through inter-marriages and the adoption of Indian manners, languages and customs that they had ceased to be foreigners. This was a tribute to the innate strength of Indian culture, as expressed in its basic ideas and institutions, but it

was also a proof of the strangely flexible character of the Indian mind. India might not have resisted political conquest, but she soon made the conquerors her own by accepting them into her fold.

From each, even the Huns, she gathered some new element of strength. The orderly administration of the twentieth satrapy was observed, and later served as a model for the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta. The Greeks left behind them a beautifully minted standard coinage, which facilitated the prosperous international trade of the Kushan era. The Kushans, who had already been exposed to a higher civilization during a sojourn of a century in Bactria before they moved into India in the second century B.C., contributed a new form of art, Gandharan art. It was a forceful medium, suitable to the time and place, for translating and propagating, even to far-away China, the message of Buddhism they had received from India, and which had so miraculously tamed their own restless Asiatic souls. Roving tribes of Sakas and Huns, barbarous but virile, pushed still deeper into India. Many of their chieftains took daughters of defeated Indian kings in marriage. From among their vigorous offspring, initiated into Hinduism by sacred fire-rites performed near Mount Abu, powerful Rajput clans later arose.

During the early centuries, too, India received and absorbed a few foreigners who came not through lust of power and greed, but as religious refugees, or simple traders. A little band of Syrian Christians, escaping from Roman persecution, arrived in Kerala in the first century A.D. They were hospitably welcomed, allowed to settle down and follow their religion in peace, and they became the nucleus of the first Indian Christian community. Jewish refugees arrived, and became Indian Jews. Zoroastrians from southern Persia, fleeing before the Arab whirlwind, landed on the west coast of India, somewhere north of the present Bombay, more than a thousand years ago. Their descendants are the advanced and able Parsi community of the present time.

Two other principal waves of invaders have also influenced India, and far more profoundly than any of the casual visitors of earlier times.

Between the thirteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth, rival Muslim conquerors from Afghanistan and Central

Asia, all heading for Delhi, followed close on one another's heels. Delhi became the Muslim capital of India for the next seven hundred years. As a result, India now has over fifty million Muslim citizens, the third largest Muslim population of any country in the world, next only to Indonesia and Pakistan. All but a fraction of them are Indian by birth and descent, though Muslim by faith. They did not join Pakistan, but have remained in India, keeping their rightful place among other integral groups of the population. India, which has never accepted the so-called two-nation theory—the basis for the creation of Pakistan—welcomes her Muslim nationals and will not betray their trust.

As the great empire of the Mughals sickened and fell apart, the Europeans inopportunely arrived upon the scene, and out of their jealousies and petty wars British India next emerged. This happened only yesterday, and already the desultory residue of this last conquest of India, before freedom was finally won, is being swept aside. The British, too, though they never made India their home, have left behind an Anglo-Indian community. Though not very large in numbers, this group has nevertheless come to occupy a useful place in the national life of the country.

Both the Muslims and the British added new languages and scripts to the many already in use in India—Urdu and Persian, and the Persian script, and English, together with the Roman script. India's rich cultural inheritance from medieval Iran was a gift from her Mughal rulers. To the British India owes the English language, hitherto the chief means of communication among Indians otherwise cut off from one another by regional language barriers. It has also been the means of contact between India and all the other countries of Asia and the West. Hindi has now become the national language, but English has opened the door for India into the larger international world.

## CHAPTER III

### ROOTS OF INDIAN CULTURE

The composers of the Vedic hymns, *rishis* and seers as they were, were vigorous spokesmen of a freedom-loving community. They were also Nature-poets of a high order. The varied aspects and moods of the world around them filled them with awe and delight.

They watched the delicate beauty of the unveiling Dawn, hailed with joy the rising Sun, trembled before the fierce onslaught of the Storm who wore the lightning for an ornament. They gave thanks to beneficent Rain which caused grass to sprout for their herds and barley and corn for themselves. In Wind, Sky and Ocean, they caught a vision of infinite space. The waxing and waning Moon, relentless marker of time, measured the rise and flow of sap in the plants and their own life's span. Stars were the abode of many who had gone on before. To the immovable Mountain, with matted locks of snow, plunged in silent meditation, they lifted adoring hearts. Rivers seemed to them majestic goddesses. Fire, presiding over the Aryan hearth and altar, was their radiant friend.

These early Aryan divinities, the bright Devas, were given names and worshipped—not in the form of images in temples, but with hymns of praise and sacrificial offerings. They were described as riding the sky in chariots or descending to mingle in the affairs of men, and to help their devotees. Indra, king of the gods and leader of Aryan battles, was the only one who wore the linements of a more or less human god. The others were strangely formless, trailing a vague mystery about them. Each in turn was addressed as all-supreme, but some final conviction seemed to be lacking on the part of the hymn-singers. The enquiring Aryan mind was searching for something more ultimate, something behind and beyond the whole of the manifested universe.

In the tenth and last book of the Rigveda appear the wonderful philosophic hymns which ask and answer profound questions posed by the early Aryans. What was there before this world,

this sky, and this earth became visible, when there was yet no distinction between night and day, when neither death nor deathlessness were known? There was the Golden Germ, source of all life. There was *Purush*, the Universal Being, with infinite heads, unnumbered eyes and unnumbered feet. There was that One, neither male nor female, the eternal, impersonal principle inseparably united with its own power of manifestation. Other than it, nothing was. And there came the ultimate affirmation: "That which exists is one, the sages call it by many names."

Having reached this point, it might seem impossible for thought to go any further, but the practical problem of man's relation to the One had yet to be resolved. In the post-Rigvedic period, aglow with the wisdom of the Upanishads, the teacher proclaimed to his disciples in the forest schools, *Tat Tvam Asi*, 'That Thou Art'. Man, in his essence, cannot be different from the One. He is not merely an infinitesimal part of a part-less Infinite. He himself is the Infinite. Body and form are only his outer garments, worn and cast aside. The realization of this truth means immortality. Again the Upanishads thundered forth: "Not by wealth, not by progeny, but by renunciation alone is immortality to be reached."

The future direction of Indian religions and philosophies, and characteristic social and cultural patterns of the India-to-be, were now foreshadowed.

The idea of spiritual unity had been grasped, but everywhere in the world man was confronted with endless variety. How could the obviously differing tendencies and capacities of human beings lead to an ultimate, identical goal? The Indian mind demanded an explanation, and found it in the fundamental doctrine of Rebirth, linked to the concept of *Karma*. One life is too short a time for all to achieve supreme spiritual knowledge. So men must be born again and again, progressing through many lives, from lower to higher forms. They experience the fruits of their past actions, both good and bad, and continue to create fresh *Karma* for themselves by new actions until at last the veil of ignorance drops, and they become aware of their divine nature. Thereafter they are freed from further rounds of birth and death.

These ideas of Rebirth and *Karma* were easily accepted in ancient India. Nearly all primitive peoples take as axiomatic the soul's migration into other bodies and forms, but the evil

potentiality of a fate over which they have no control fills them with dread. The Indian doctrine of *Karma* gave a new ethical basis to the primitive belief in transmigration. It made no discrimination between people of different levels but applied equally to all. It taught men to strive after good, rather than evil, and it gave them a spirit of tolerance. Each of us is at the appointed rung of the ladder to which our combined good and bad deeds have permitted us to climb—and all are on the way up.

In the sixth century B.C., Buddhism and Jainism added a new emphasis to the Upanishad teachings. Not only men, but animals, and the minutest things that flutter, move or breathe, are alike expressions of one life-force. The Karmic "seeds" are there, too, and each has the right to live out its own life. A sudden new tenderness entered into the relationship between human beings and the animal world, and the doctrine of *Ahimsa* or non-injury, became part of the spiritual heritage of India. In his sermons, the Buddha recounted many stories of his previous lives in the form of animals or birds, as well as lowly human beings. In each, the *Bodhisattva* ideals of unselfishness, charity and love found expression through some act of noble sacrifice for the sake of another. Among the Jain followers of Mahavira, the Buddha's great contemporary, the practice of the vow of non-injury towards all living creatures became an integral part of the discipline. A Jain would not walk at night, lest he inadvertently crush life out of a worm.

Another powerful conception of early Indian thought was that of ever-recurring Cycles of Time. With life moving in an endless stream, and the perspective of an infinitely unwinding scroll, no element of vulgar haste attended the primal scheme of things as envisioned by early Indian thinkers. The worlds themselves are swinging in vast unmeasurable cycles. There is an apparent beginning and end, but it is only apparent. From the finer unmanifested state, the present universe—only one of an infinite series—has become manifest and will again return to an unmanifested state. Creation is but the name of the first phase, growth of the middle phase, dissolution of the last phase, of the eternal process. Aeons succeed aeons. Universes take birth and dissolve, and take form again, through all eternity. To effect this tremendous play, the formless *Brahman* is conceived as putting forth his power under the three fold aspect of *Brahma*

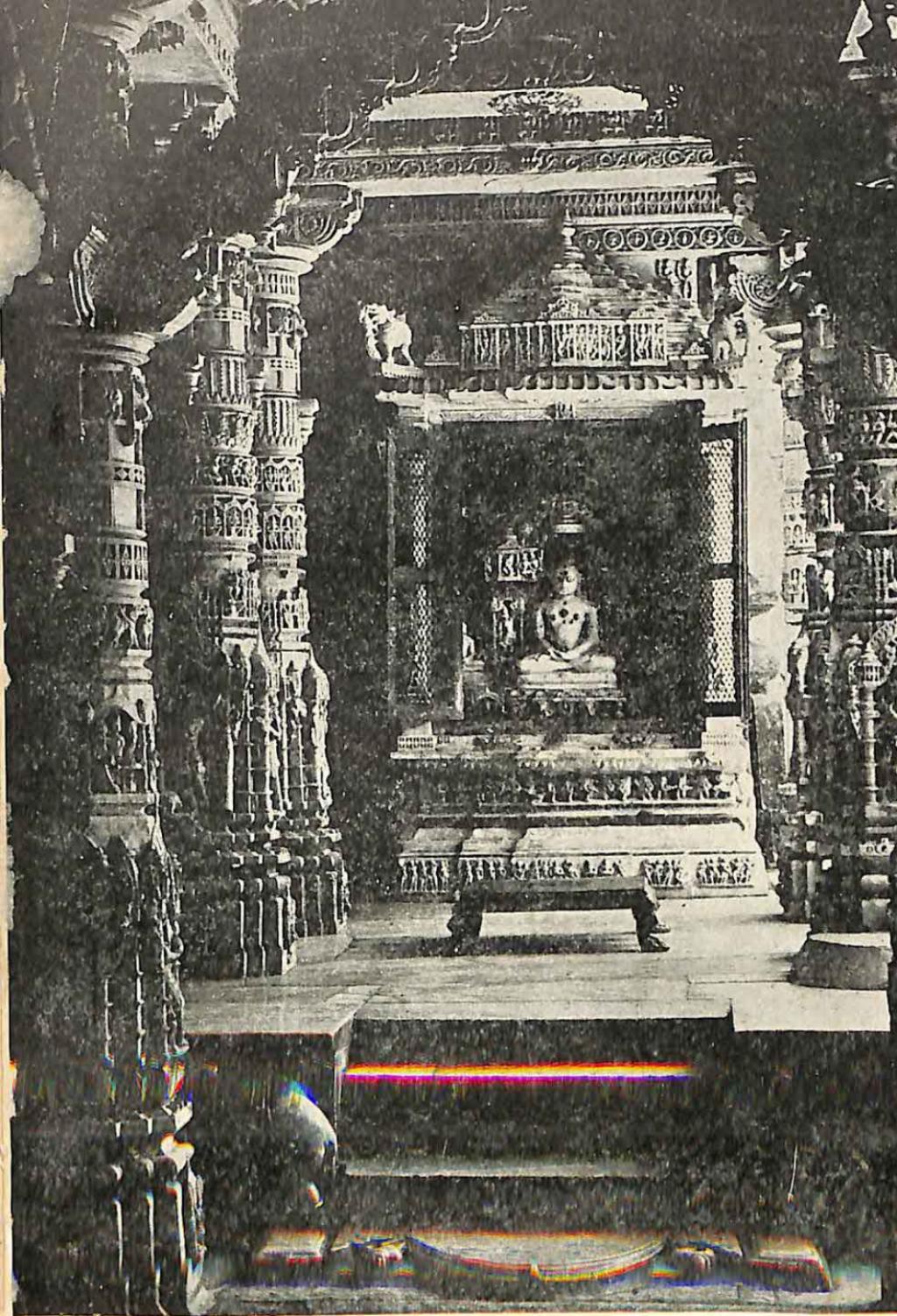
the Creator, Vishnu the Upholder and Sustainer, and Siva the Destroyer—chief gods of later Hinduism.

Such were some of the fundamental ideas thoughts which took root in ancient India and profoundly influenced the life of the people, reflecting themselves in Indian social, economic and cultural institutions.

In the original society of Aryan freemen, the priests, the herdsmen and cultivators, and the warriors were indifferently drawn from one and the same community, and men followed one occupation or another to suit the particular need of the moment. The head of the patriarchal family made the offerings and chanted the appropriate hymns before the family altar. When the period of wandering and camp-life was over and the Indian Aryans settled down in their new homeland, a division of functions came into existence. The new divisions were not absolutely fixed and rigid, and for a long time there was some exchange between the groups, but gradually the Hindu caste system, as we now know it, became crystallized.

Three classes were first formed—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. The first consisted of priests, teachers and law-makers, the second of warriors (from among whom the king was chosen), and the third of herdsmen, cultivators and traders. Below these, a fourth class of Sudras presently emerged. It consisted of large numbers of the original inhabitants who had become Aryanized and had been absorbed into the society on a somewhat inferior footing. Still others remained untouched by Aryan influence. They continued to live apart, in forest or jungle, following their own primitive customs. Eventually, some began to creep up to the fringes of the larger communities, and humbly took upon themselves the most menial and filthy of the community tasks. *Though their services were accepted, they were despised for the work they did and were treated as untouchables. The depressed and backward classes of Indian society today, who are perhaps their lineal descendants, still suffer the stigma of prejudice of an earlier age in which ritual purity was scrupulously cherished.*

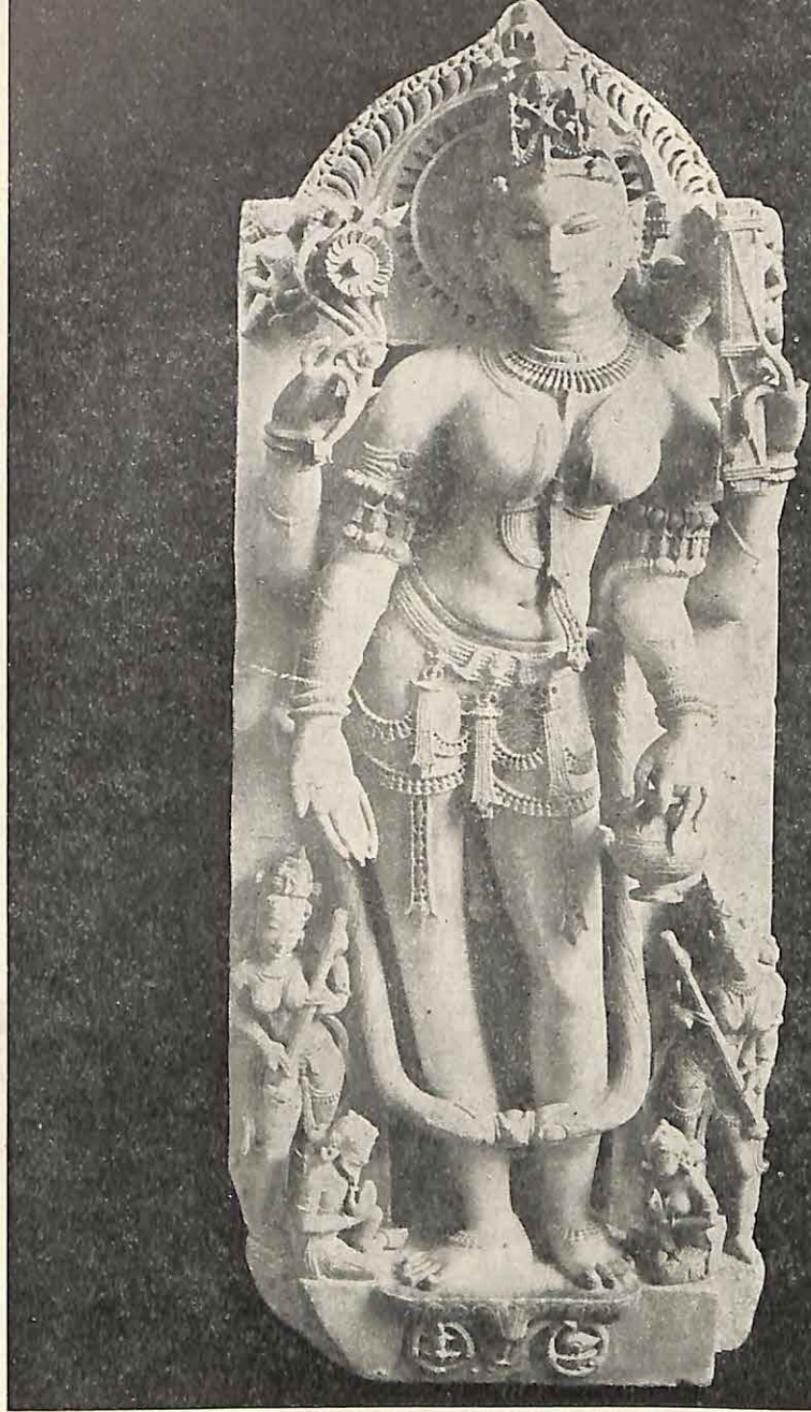
In early Dravidian society, the divisions were based on regional rather than functional classification. People were grouped according to the type of geographical area they came from—mountain, forest, plain or sea-coast. Such regional divisions played a dominant part in determining the work of people, and



*Jain Temple in white marble  
Dilwara, Mount Abu (11th century A.D.)*



*Lingaraja Temple  
Bhuvaneswar (11th century A.D.)*



*Saraswati, Goddess of Learning*  
Marble figure from Bikaner (12th century A.D.)



*Gopuram (gate-tower) of Varadaraja Temple  
Kanchi (circa 13th century A.D.)*

1 South India, too, functional occupations gradually tended to become hereditary. Like their forefathers before them, for example, the folk of the sea-coast followed specialized occupations as fishermen, pearl-fishers, makers of boats or of nets, salt-makers, or traders in salt, shell or pearls. Upon this economic sub-structure, the Aryan caste system gradually took hold, thus spreading over the whole of India. Yet in the South, while Brahmins occupied the highest rank in the social scale as they did in the North, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were practically non-existent. Sudras took the place of the latter, but since they constituted the bulk of the population their status was not inferior. Strangely enough, however, in South India the untouchables were condemned to the worst form of social oppression that has ever been known in India.

The distinctive feature of the caste system was that men were not only expected to follow a given functional occupation, but were considered born to it as a result of their past *Karma*. They married within the particular caste, and could never escape from it as long as they remained in Hindu society.

Like all schemes of social and economic organization, the caste system had both defects and virtues. It produced a remarkably integrated economy in which chaotic competition was eliminated and ordered co-operation among different groups became natural. Every man had a given work to do, and he could not feel alone in doing it. Techniques and knowledge, handed down from family to family, made him familiar from childhood with every aspect of his special caste work, and he developed a high degree of skill and a natural aptitude for it. This gave him self-confidence and self-respect. Within the caste, he was an equal of every other member, and the caste gave him a feeling of solidarity with the group. Each caste made its own rules and governed itself through the caste panchayat. Not even a Brahmin could dictate what customs, in regard to food, marriage and so forth, any other caste should follow. Very largely as a result of the caste system, alien conquests of later centuries were confined to the political field, and Indian society was saved from complete break-up within. One may well wonder whether India could ever have survived a thousand years of disintegrating foreign rule and emerged once again as the great nation of today without some such hard core as the caste system.

Another typical and enduring institution was that of the Indian village. What would India be without its villages? The charm, the stability, the simplicity, the vitality of India itself is still wrapped up in her village life. In spite of its present poverty, the village lives, because it has remained an organic whole. The idea of a common good bound together all the different groups within the village.

Everyone was given his chance to earn a living by contributing to the essential needs of the village. There was no unemployment. Carpenters, iron-smiths, washermen, barbers and potters were paid in village grain, on the basis of a proportionate share handed over at harvest time by each cultivating family. Weavers, dyers, metal-workers and others exchanged their wares for the grain they needed. The village accountant, the watchman, the Brahmin school teacher and the Brahmin priest, who performed all the household ceremonies enjoined by scriptures, were also an integral part of the village unit, receiving their support from it in return for their services. A panchayat, chosen by the people from among themselves, ran the over-all affairs of the village and saw to the enforcement of the customary laws. The village was thus both self-contained and basically democratic. The collection of taxes, in kind, by the king's officers was almost its only link with the outside world.

Between city and city, trade guilds strengthened the economic solidarity of the castes and widened their contact. Through the demand for luxuries in the cities, higher standards of craft workmanship were fostered. Village craftsmen could always find their way to a city and obtain a better return for their labours than mere livelihood if they could show the artist's true mastery.

Whether men lived in society or left it, the spiritual emphasis in Indian life was never lost sight of, and a way always lay open for every individual, whatever his status, caste, limitation or inclination, to advance towards a spiritual ideal. For the heroic few, the path was that of renunciation and knowledge. For the many, it was the faithful fulfilment of Dharma, as laid down in the scriptures, and devotion to God, according to one's best understanding.

However, even ordinary men were given an opportunity to follow the heroic few, if they so chose, to the mountain cave

or forest *Asrama*, in the latter part of their lives. Social custom sanctioned the division of life into two parts—one, active and practical, the other, meditative and spiritual. In the first period, the student left home, observed strict self-control or *brahmacharya*, and mastered the sacred literature under a qualified teacher. He then married, had children and fulfilled all his worldly duties to his family and society. In the second period of his life, he was freely permitted to retire to the forest and devote himself exclusively to the spiritual quest. If he succeeded in reaching the goal of self-knowledge, he became a *Sannyasi*, freed from all bonds.

In the Buddhistic period, those who felt an urge to leave the world of *maya* flocked to the monasteries to become monks. Women also cut their hair and put on the robes of renunciation. By refusing to recognize the privileged position of the Brahmin priest, Buddhism indirectly undermined caste. The monasteries were thrown open to all, and in the Middle Way of the Buddha severe austerities were discouraged. The rules of the Sangha or Brotherhood were truthfulness, simplicity, courtesy, harmlessness, service, and "diligent striving", and the means to enlightenment were right thoughts, words and conduct.

The other way—the way of *Dharma* and devotion to the Lord, as taught in the *Gita*—was simpler and easier to follow, and it naturally became the way for most. It required no supreme act of renunciation and withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, the world was accepted as real, and each individual had a definite place in it and definite duties to perform, which varied according to time and circumstances. A child owed its parents loving obedience. The chaste wife owed her selfless devotion to her husband and family. The husband owed support and protection to his wife and children, and hospitality to whomsoever might seek it. Caste work was to be properly performed. A Brahmin was to acquire knowledge and impart it to his disciples, and he was not to accumulate riches. A king was expected to rule justly, protect the people, and promote their prosperity. The warrior was to fight bravely, but always with chivalry. The goldsmith was to give his client the full value of the gold ordered. *Dharma* required a man to live in society as a civilized human being, checking his selfish urges in the interests of

others. If he could do this, and have faith in and love for the Lord, he, too, would reach the goal.

The stability of Indian life, for centuries past, has rested on the firm foundation of Dharma. So has the integrated Hindu family. Through the inculcation of the spirit of Dharma, high standards of ethics, clear-cut codes of behaviour, and a widespread acceptance of non-material values as of higher importance than possessions, have come to be the expression in ordinary society of true Indian culture.

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## CHAPTER IV

### CULTURAL CONTINUITY

A seed takes its own quiet time to germinate and grow into a big tree. Before quick and easy modern methods of communication were available, people mostly walked to get anywhere and Indians used to walk all over their country (as many still do). Walkers are in no hurry, and they have plenty of time to look around, and use their eyes and ears. Back and forth across India passed the contagious cultural ideas which everywhere eventually took root and came to flower in a typically Indian way of life. Long ago, enough agreement on fundamentals was reached to give the vast majority of the people a deep feeling of common unity, of belonging to a common land.

### HIGHER EDUCATION

An insatiable thirst for knowledge—not only of the temporal, but also of that which is Eternal—existed in India from ancient Vedic times. In view of the respect for learning, and for its outward symbol, the Brahmin, it is not surprising that India evolved an elaborate system of higher education, in charge of Brahmins, at a very early period in her history. *Tols* and *Asramas*, and the later temple-schools attracted large numbers of students, though these were mostly confined to the privileged classes. With the passing of centuries, as Vedic Sanskrit became increasingly difficult and archaic, the students had to spend much time and energy in mastering Sanskrit grammar with the help of Panini's famous work. Besides the *Vedas*, the *Vedangas* and grammar, the other main subjects of study were metre and poetic composition, rhetoric, and the various systems of Hindu philosophical thought. Since the *Vedas* were considered too sacred to be put into writing, the usual method of learning was oral. The teacher expounded, the student memorized, and what he got by heart became his own for ever.

Education was not confined solely to Brahmin schools, however. Some two thousand years ago, Tamilnad could boast of its

great Sangams at Madurai where ancient Tamil works were critically studied by the scholars of those days and assembled into the great collections of secular poems which constitute the largely pre-Aryan classical inheritance of the Tamilians. Buddhism and Jainism, rejecting the sacred authority of the Vedas and the special position of the Brahmins, introduced their own emphasis into education. Yet when Sanskrit was adopted as the language of Mahayana Buddhism, in about the first century A.D., Buddhist scholars had to add the study of Sanskrit to that of Pali, the sacred language of the earliest Buddhist texts. The Jains also began to use Sanskrit as their literary language at a somewhat later period. Thus Sanskrit became a potent means of binding the whole country together, both as a common language and because of the wonderfully rich Sanskrit literature.

The translation and copying of manuscripts in Buddhist monasteries became a vast industry, and monastic schools and colleges expanded at a rapid rate. Courses of instruction seem to have been extraordinarily comprehensive. They covered not only the separate sects of Buddhism (eighteen), logic, metaphysics, ritualism, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, Pali and Sanskrit, but Vedic literature and current schools of Brahmin philosophy as well. Jain schools, though less is known of them, obviously followed the same general type of curriculum, since it represented the essential culture of the day.

Centuries before the first universities of Europe came into existence, India had developed famous centres of higher education in many widely separated parts of the country. In Gandhara in the far north-west, as early as the sixth century B. C., Takshashila—Taxila, as the Greeks called it (now in Pakistan)—attracted students from all over India. Its courses in military science were especially useful for the sons of kings. In later centuries, Srinagar, in Kashmir, took its place as the great northern seat of learning and pandits flocked thither from far and near. Sravasti, Kasi, Pataliputra, Nalanda, Vikramasila, Somapuri (Paharpur) and Tamluk were the famous centres of higher studies in what are now Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. Ujjain in western Malwa, Padmavati near modern Gwalior, Vanavasi in the Konkan, and Valabhi and Palitana in Saurashtra were the principal centres in Central and Western India. Andhra had its Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. In South India, besides Madurai, there was

Kanchi or Conjeevaram. During the period of Pallava supremacy, between the fourth and ninth centuries A.D., Kanchi was the greatest university town of Southern India.

It was from centres like these that a stream of Indian scholars and teachers went out across the mountains and seas to distant lands of Asia in the early centuries of the Christian era, carrying with them the great religious and cultural ideas of India, which profoundly influenced the civilizations of Indonesia, Burma, Siam, Indo-China, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Nepal. The Indian universities also made possible the immense literary output of religious commentaries, law-books, poetic compositions, dramas, tales, moral guides, technical treatises and abstruse philosophic works, practically all in Sanskrit, which wore the high stamp of Indian culture in those early times.

An interesting picture of Nalanda, as it existed in the first part of the seventh century, has come down from the writing-brush of the famous Chinese Buddhist scholar, Yuan Chwang, who spent fourteen years in India, including five in residence at Nalanda. Although there were no fewer than 5,000 students on the roll in his time, including some who had travelled all the way from China, Korea and Tibet, it seems that the entrance examinations were so stiff that not even a third of those actually clamouring for admission could get in ! Needy students, we were told, received free tuition, board, lodging, medical attention, and even clothes. There were a hundred lecture halls. As for Nalanda's great collection of manuscripts, the main attraction for foreign students, it was so huge that it had to be housed in three separate buildings in a special library quarter known as the "mart of knowledge".

How irreparable to India was the destruction of some of her ancient seats of learning by untutored conquerors ! Taxila was destroyed by the Huns in the fifth century, Nalanda and Vikramasila by hordes from Central Asia and Afghanistan in the opening years of the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, at that time, no learned Al-Beruni was present to save the manuscripts. Those of Nalanda were totally destroyed, and the Muslim chronicler describes how at Vikramasila, after all the shaven-headed monks had been put to the sword in 1203, not a single inmate survived to explain the contents of the many books found lying there. Later, the invaders discovered that Vikramasila was not the fortress they had imagined it to be, but a college.

When the Sultans had firmly established their rules at Delhi, many of them displayed a cultured appreciation of learning, if mainly of Turkish, Arabic and Persian learning. The eccentric Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq lavished incredible sums on the maintenance of mosque-schools in Delhi in the fourteenth century, and his reputation as a patron of learning and culture was such that poets and scholars flocked to the Indian capital from all parts of Asia, and even from North Africa. In the fifteenth century, the great minister of the Bahmani dynasty in the Deccan, Mahmud Gavan, spent his personal fortune in building a *madrasah* at Bidar, to which was attached a library containing his magnificent collection of 3,000 volumes.

In the same way, Indian kings, throughout the medieval period, were patrons of higher education. Among some of the well-known institutions founded by them were the famous Sanskrit college at Dhar established by Bhoja Paramara in the early part of the eleventh century, and a college for the study of astronomy founded in Khandesh by the Yadava king, Singhana, in the thirteenth century. Every king took pride in making his own court a miniature focus of culture. Poets, musicians, dramatists and scholars were always sure of the generous support of Indian kings.

#### SPIRIT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

An old Pali work, the *Milinda Panha* or 'Questions of Milinda,' tells us that in the second century B.C. the streets of Sakala (Sialkot), then the capital of the Indo-Greek king Menander or Milinda, were continually resounding "with cries of welcome to teachers of every creed". Such religious tolerance was characteristic of India. In medieval times, great public debates were frequently held at which the followers of different religious sects and schools of philosophic thought presented their views. Yuan Chwang attended one such huge conference organized by Harsha Vardhana of Kanauj in the seventh century, and the foreign scholar was given the singular honour of presiding. Several thousand Buddhist monks of both the Hinayana and Mahayana schools were present, and no fewer than three thousand Brahmins and Jains ! Harsha was converted to Mahayana Buddhism after hearing the brilliant exposition of Yuan Chwang.

One reads of Tamil kings likewise converted from Jainism to the Saiva or Vaishnava forms of faith, after listening to similar Jain-Hindu debates in the South Indian capitals. This type of serious debate, conducted in an orderly and decorous manner, indicates the highly cultured state of mind obtaining in medieval India.

It was by means of public debates, as well as through his profound philosophical writings in Sanskrit, that Sankaracharya, the great South Indian Brahmin of Kerala, born probably in the eighth century A.D., brought about the lasting revival of Hinduism. He went up and down the country, even visiting Kashmir and the remote regions of the Himalayas, meeting his principal opponents, the Buddhists, in keen intellectual contests and everywhere defeating them. By his time Buddhism was showing signs of debasement and with his unmatched intellect and penetrating knowledge, he cut at the root of much confused speculation and dry scholasticism, and gave back to India the essential doctrine of *Brahman*, the one-without-a-second.

Yet Sankara described the manifesting and dynamic agent of the formless *Brahman* as the supreme Personal God, his own preference being for Siva, god of the Yogis and Sannyasis. For ordinary men he approved the use of images and rituals. Sankara's own hymns to Siva and the Mother of the Universe reverberate down the ages. He also insisted that no man, by reason of caste alone, should be debarred from the knowledge of the Ultimate. After Sankara, Buddhism rapidly declined, and the Vedanta philosophy of the unity of soul, with minor variations and modifications, was accepted as the fundamental background of thought in practically every Hindu sect. Sankara's commentaries on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita also restored these as the sacred, authoritative texts. Before his death, at the young age of thirty-two, Sankara founded four *maths* for Hindu Sannyasis on the four sides of India—Puri, Dwaraka, Sringeri and Badrinath, thus fostering, in a practical way, the spiritual unity of the country.

#### DIFFUSION OF GENERAL CULTURE

If this was the type of higher thought possible in India for educated persons more than a thousand years ago, no less

remarkable was the widely diffused culture of the masses. Access to Vedic texts was traditionally forbidden to a considerable part of the population, including Sudras and women, but there was never any ban on the popular dissemination of the highest religious truths through popular works. A thousand and one subjects were treated in the inexhaustible reservoir of the two great Sanskrit Epics, the Puranas, the Pancharatras, the Agamas, the Tantras, the Niti Sastras, the Silpa Sastras, and similar productions. They were the vast treasures of the people both in matters of religion and education. In particular, the Epics and the Puranas, current in some form at least as early as 500 B.C. and given their present and final form not later than 500 A.D., embodied almost everything that had ever been thought or experienced in India from remotest antiquity. Here was the enduring inspiration of the Indian people.

While Valmiki's Ramayana is limited to the single theme of the exploits of Rama as Aryan prince and hero, the Mahabharata and the Puranas embrace the whole universe of gods and men. Brahma, the creator; Vishnu (more especially in his Incarnations of Rama and Krishna) upholding the universe and bestowing salvation on his devotees; the mighty Siva, destroyer of illusion; Devi, his Sakti, represented as the Divine Mother of the Universe under many names and forms; their two sons, Ganesa and Kartikeya; and all the other gods and goddesses and lesser heavenly beings, play their intricate roles, often descending to earth and entering into the affairs of men so that the latter may come to love them, and learn to discriminate between that which is transient and that which is eternal.

Here, too, in the popular literature, is a vast collection of old stories, legends and myths, royal genealogies, records of historical happenings, descriptions of sacred rivers, mountains and all the holy places of pilgrimage, accounts of the undying *rishis* in their hermitages, explanations of the frame-work of creation, of the theory of the ever-recurring cycles and great *kalpas* of Time, of rebirth and *Karma*. All the heroes of India and all the gods are here, along with accounts of their heavens, and edifying instructions for the proper worship of the gods. Here are poetry, entertainment, philosophy and religion, for all without an exception. When one remembers that the Bhagavad Gita is only a leaf out of the gigantic forest of the Mahabharata, one faintly

appreciates the incalculable influence of India's Epic literature on her cultural history.

Villages are still visited by Brahmin story-tellers and wandering holy men who read aloud, or paraphrase and dramatize stories from the Epics and Puranas to spell-bound audiences. Century after century the whole of India has derived inspiration and entertainment from such recitations and dramas built round the eternal themes of gods, *rishis* and beloved national heroes. To this day, the Ramlila on a grand scale is an annual feature of even the sophisticated life of Delhi, while the towns and villages of Rama's "home country", Uttar Pradesh, likewise re-enact every year the chief episodes of the Ramayana.

The wonderful characters live eternally in the minds and hearts of the people. Rama is the ideal king, Sita the ideal wife, Bharata and Lakshmana are outstanding examples of brotherly love and loyalty. Mahavira is the perfect *karmayogi* and *Bhakta*, in the body of a monkey (though mythologically the son of a god). The great Pandavas and the noble Draupadi, Savitri whose love defied Death itself, Damayanti, Sakuntala, and all the others, show the way of fearlessness, truthfulness, faithfulness, and unselfish devotion to duty. They have taught India its basic social ideals and have set the pattern of the ideal character. This indeed is the living culture of the people today.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF EPICS AND PURANAS

How unifying has been the influence of the Epics and Puranas can be gathered from the number of translations made from the Sanskrit into the various regional Indian languages. The following list, far from complete, will give some idea of the vitality of the all-India tradition. A Tamil translation of the Skanda Purana dates probably from the eighth century, and the first Tamil Mahabharata belongs to about the same period. In the eleventh century, Kamban produced the first Tamil Ramayana. Two Jain authors, Adi Pampa and Abhinava Pampa, of the tenth and twelfth centuries, were responsible for abridged versions in Kannada of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Inspired by them, Nannaya Bhatta, requested to do so by the reigning Eastern Chalukya sovereign, began a Telugu adaptation of the Mahabharata in the eleventh century, the earliest known work in the

Telugu language. This translation was continued by Tikkana, in the thirteenth century, and finally concluded by Yerrapreggada in the fourteenth. Meanwhile, a Telugu Ramayana also appeared, and Potana, a disciple of Tikkana, produced exceedingly popular Telugu versions of several of the Puranas. In Malayalam also, similar translations and adaptations, at first derived from Tamil sources, date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In northern India, Kirtibas Ojha had the honour of producing the first Bengali Ramayana in the fourteenth century, and other versions, as also an abridged Bengali Mahabharata, soon followed. The first Bengali Bhagavatam was the work of Maladhar Basu. It was written during the fifteenth century, at the order of the Muslim ruler of Bengal, Sultan Hussain Shah. The beginning of Assamese literature, in the thirteenth century, took the form of renderings of selections and elaborated incidents from the Puranas and the Mahabharata. In the next century appeared a remarkably faithful Assamese translation of the Ramayana by Madhava Kandali, and in the fifteenth, partial versions of the Bhagavatam and the Ramayana, as well as a compilation of various Puranas and the Gita, by Sankar Deva. A full translation of the Mahabharata was achieved during the following century by Ram Saraswati. Two Sudra authors of the fifteenth century, Saroldas and Balramdas, produced the first Oriya versions of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which were followed shortly by an Oriya Bhagavatam. Finally, in the sixteenth century, the star of Tulsidas rose in the sky of northern India. His free Hindi version of the Ramayana, the *Ramacharitamanasa*, has superseded Valmiki's original in popularity throughout most of Northern India.

To round off the summary, the first English translation of the Mahabharata is also worthy of mention, a nineteenth century undertaking of love by the Bengali scholar, Pratap Chandra Roy. A definitive Sanskrit edition of the Mahabharata based on the collation and study of all known early manuscripts undertaken by the Bhandarkar Institute at Poona, is now being published in several volumes, after years of strenuous labour.

Besides direct translations and fairly close adaptations, innumerable original poems, both in Sanskrit and in regional languages, took their inspiration from the same sources. It seemed that the people were never tired of hearing the old tales. Kings

and kingdoms came and went, dynasties rose and fell, but beneath the superficial changes and vicissitudes of political destiny, the people, through common religious symbols and myths, common spiritual values and common social institutions, remained firmly integrated.

### IMAGES AND TEMPLES

Art was another important expression of the common culture. Buddhist art radiated a spirit of tranquil other-worldliness, or in the narrative art, based on the Jatakas and similar source materials, a native and charming naturalism, while Jain images suggested the immobility of death itself. Hindu images, on the other hand, though probably very often the work of the same craftsmen, were disturbingly vital in their effect. Intensely human in action, they were at the same time always much more than human. No attempt was ever made to turn the Hindu gods into mere mortals. Their divinity, as described in the Puranas, was unmistakably indicated in many ways. They were given multiple arms or heads, or the all-seeing Third Eye, symbolic of their supernatural power. Some of them were distinguished by heads of animals on human bodies. As the terrible and the beautiful were both viewed as eternal aspects of world and life, created by the gods themselves, so the gods were frequently depicted in forms terrifying to behold. In all this, there was nothing appalling or inconsistent to the Hindu mind, steeped as it was in the immensities of Puranic imagery. The symbolism was already fixed, and the artists merely selected from the infinite store-house the obviously dramatic episodes, established the artistic conventions and popularized the themes by endless repetition. Different schools of sculpture arose in different parts of the country, but their local variations were mainly due to the nature of the different materials available and the resulting differences in technical treatment. The themes were everywhere the same. The types of each god and goddess, with their familiar attributes and accompanying animal or bird, were established once for all, and no Hindu ever felt strange in their presence. Hindu religious art—and there was no other—excluded nothing from its purview, and in all its manifold expression continually

reminded the worshipper of the endless symbolic play of the gods.

Though temples and images had not formed a part of Vedic ritual, they came into wide use in India from the time of their first adoption by Mahayana Buddhists. Earlier, Buddhists had revered the Buddha as a Great Teacher and Leader, but had not deified him. When they wished to indicate his presence in their sculptures, as for instance in the beautiful gateways of the great-Sanchi Stupa in Bhopal, they did so not by any physical representation but by reticent symbols such as foot-prints, the Bodhi tree, or the Stupa, signifying the Mahanirvana.

A fundamental change was introduced when, in the North, doctrines of the Greater Vehicle supplanted those of the Smaller Vehicle. A whole hierarchy of Buddhist divinities now suddenly became the object of intense worship and Nirvana was translated into a crowded Buddhist heaven. The foreign Kushans, converted to the Mahayana form of Buddhism in the first century A.D., were literal and objective in their worship and, for the first time in India, the Buddha image appeared in Gandharan art. The Kushans even impressed the standing image of Buddha on some of their coins with the Greek name *Boddo* inscribed on one side.

The outward expression of theistic and devotional feeling in India at this time clearly met an inner psychological need. By the first years of Kanishka's reign, image-making had spread as far as Mathura, the southern capital of the Kushan empire. Statues of the Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* carved from Mathura sandstone and evidently intended for niches in temples and shrines, were transported to distant places, and a century or two later were being turned out in great numbers at Banaras, in the heart of the Gupta empire, as well as in Buddhist centres in Andhra, like Amaravati. Jain images of the Tirathankaras date from about the same period. As might have been expected, images of Hindu gods and goddesses, in their hundreds of thousands, also began to pour out from the Indian workshops, to satisfy the eager desire of worshippers for a visual representation of their deities. A new phase in India's cultural development came into being with this prolific artistic activity. And since images require a permanent habitation, temples, together

with the elaborate rituals of worship connected with them, began to develop on a grand scale.

India's earliest surviving temples are rock-cut Mahayana Buddhist Chaityas or worship-halls, hollowed out from solid rocks or cliffs, in imitation of wooden prototypes which have long since vanished. Such halls, originally Hinayana imageless Chaityas, were modified to Mahayana use in the great Buddhist monastic retreat of Ajanta, perhaps in the second century A.D. Jain cave retreats were even older, but it is difficult to call any of them temples. Hindus, copying the Buddhists, began to make cave-temples during the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, dedicating them to Vishnu, Siva or Durga. Such excavated temples exist in Central India at Badami, at Mamallapuram and elsewhere in the Tamil country, at Ellora and Aurangabad in the Deccan, and at Elephanta an Salsette Island in Bombay harbour.

The construction of Hindu masonry temples, on the testimony of standing remains, began in the Gupta period. Of brick or stone, the Gupta temples were small, consisting of a single flat-roofed cell a few feet square for enshrining the image, with a shallow porch in front. After the disintegration of the Gupta empire, local dynasties all over India assumed independence and a craze of temple building swept India, continuing until it was rudely checked by the Muslim conquest. Once more, as in the case of sculptors, distinct schools of architecture arose in different parts of the country, to add their glorious chapters to India's creative achievements. Some of the great medieval temples lie in gray, ruined heaps thrown down by the inexorable hand of time (though more often than not by the wanton hand of man), but some are still nobly intact, frequented by devout Hindus today exactly as they have been for the past thousand years and more.

As the Chalukyas in the Deccan and the Pallavas in the Tamil country were experimenting with the early type of Dravidian temple tower, rising in receding, heavily-carved tiers to a bulbous pinnacle high above the main shrine, the Karkota kings of Kashmir were erecting the largest stone temples yet seen in India, in the mixed Gandhara style dominated by late Graeco-Roman influences. Then followed, in the South, the magnificently huge temples of the Chola kings, the exquisite star-shaped

Hoysala temples of Mysore, the incredibly ornate temples of Vijayanagar, and the Pandya temples, with their overpowering *gopurams*, *mandapas* of a thousand pillars, splendid arcaded tanks for sacred ablutions, and awesome, shadowy galleries lined with double rows of pillars hundreds of feet long.

Northern India over the same period was equally energetic and ambitious. Temples, great and small, distinguished by the tall Indo-Aryan type of tower, in varied styles, lie thickly strewn from Bengal to Gujarat, but the destruction was naturally greater in the North than it ever was in the South. Many beautiful temples were broken and desecrated by the early invaders, and were even used as building quarries for mosques put up in their place. Nevertheless, some of the finest Hindu temples were actually erected at the very time when the invasions were taking place, and have miraculously escaped destruction. The huge Orissan temples at Bhuvaneswar, Puri and Konarak were built between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, while the fine Khajuraho temples were constructed by the Chandela rajas over the hundred-year period from 950 to 1050 A.D.

Apart from their religious significance, temples served as a natural focus of community life, whether in a village or a great city. In the past, they provided a powerful stimulus to the economic life of vast areas. Hundreds of thousands of masons and sculptors were permanently employed in their construction. Metal workers contributed images of gold, silver, copper, brass or bronze. Goldsmiths fashioned rich ornaments for the deities, and the finest silks, brocades and muslins were used in their worship. Countless lamps, tons of incense, daily offerings of garlands and enormous quantities of flowers, vast amounts of food, elaborate ingredients for the ritual bath of the deity, with Ganga water (sometimes brought by special carriers in relays from hundreds of miles away), had all to be regularly supplied. As for the ritual of the worship, this was of course performed by thousands of hereditary Brahmin priests, but the services of temple dancers, musicians and actors, as well as potters, washermen, barbers and innumerable other humble folk, were also required. In other words, the Hindu temples, supported by royal grants, donations from guilds, gifts from rich merchants and the humble offerings of the poor, gave steady employment to large

groups of the population, and helped to integrate the religious and cultural activities of the whole community.

### PILGRIMAGES

Though regular temple worship was never compulsory in Hinduism, and was even restricted due to the orthodoxy of the priesthood, the *melas* and special annual celebrations made famous temples highly popular places of pilgrimage, especially those associated with some sacred *tirtha*, as described in the Puranas. Pilgrimages to the *tirthas* have been going on ceaselessly in India for untold centuries.

The materialistic world of today may not understand the living faith which impels millions of Hindus to set out on long and arduous journeys to the sources of the great rivers, their confluences, the spots held sacred along their banks, lakes, and springs, the Himalayas and other mountains or caves sanctified by hoary legends. From the extreme South, they travel to the icy caves in the North, where the Ganga and the Yamuna take their rise, to Badri and Kedar in the Himalayas, to Siva's heaven on Mount Kailasa in the bleak tableland of Tibet. From the North, they travel all the way to Rameswaram, to worship the Sivalinga, which tradition says, was established by Ramachandra. The whole of India, indeed, belongs to the pilgrims, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. They are mostly poor, though rajas and ranis will be found among them. Many are old. A great many are women, and not a few are blind or lame. Yet they proceed undaunted, disdainful of discomfort, intent only on the goal, buoyed up by faith and devotion. They are certain that somehow a plunge into the icy waters will purify them of their sins, or that the invisible gods or *rishis*, to whom they bow down in prayerful supplication, will grant their heart's desire. Where else would fifty lakhs of people converge from every nook and corner of the land for such a bathing festival as the Kumbh Mela, the great twelfth-year gathering, held in turn at Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain? This is the India of the people, still vital, still real.

### UNIFYING FORCE OF *Bhakti*

It is a significant fact that throughout Indian history, India has invariably applied her own spiritual correctives whenever

social and religious customs and conventions have become impossibly oppressive. The free movement of Upanishadic thought counterbalanced the rigidly controlled Vedic rituals of sacrifice. Buddhism and Jainism opened their doors to all, just when Brahmin orthodoxy had shut its own against many. Along with medieval temple ritualism, in which caste exclusiveness was observed, a new liberating force was found in *bhakti*, the path of selfless love for a Supreme Lord, by which the highest spiritual union with the Divine was held to be attainable without regard to caste, sex, race or any outward form of religious observance whatever. It depended neither on ritual, nor on sacrifice, nor on learning, nor on the performance of pilgrimages, nor on visits to temples, but on the eager yearning for it and on the pure love of the devotee. The Guru, who had himself realized spiritual truth, was the disciple's guide along the path best suited to him.

Teachers, mystics, and singing saints arose in great numbers to preach the new doctrine of *bhakti*, a few of them from among those very classes which were held in low esteem on account of their humble birth. Discarding Sanskrit, the saints began to use the language of the people among whom they lived. The people listened, and the songs of the saints still ring on their lips. Every village knows at least some of them.

All the great religious and philosophic systems of thought in ancient India arose in the North. Now, suddenly, it was the Aryanized South which produced not only a Sankaracharya but the earliest of those singing saints who, taking their inspiration from the Gita, turned the heart of India in a new direction—that of monotheistic worship of one Supreme Lord. Whether the Supreme as the manifesting power of the impersonal *Brahman* was visualized as Siva, Sakti or Vishnu, or any one of Vishnu's incarnations, the language of *bhakti* was the same. The stream, fed by many springs, became a mighty river, flooding India.

As the emotional mood spread, various Hindu sects arose, and main sects became subdivided into a number of minor ones. Yet the old Indian tradition of tolerance prevailed, and there were very few instances of religious persecution. Particular dynasties might favour one form of religion in preference to another, as indicated by the building of royal temples dedicated to special deities, but it seemed that Asoka's edict on religious tolerance was not forgotten, and there was no attempt to impose

a State religion on the people of any particular area. Moreover, the various sects reacted strongly upon one another, borrowing and exchanging many fundamental ideas. Unity in variety still remained the living watch-word.

### Saints, Mystics and Reformers

Thousands of Tamil hymns by Vaishnava and Saiva saints, some of them as early as the seventh century, have come down as a fountainhead of exalted devotional literature. The twelve earliest Vaishnava saints or Alvars included a king of Malabar and the woman saint Goda, but the greatest of the early Tamil Vaishnavas was Nammalvar, a farmer by caste. Most famous of the Saivite saints of Tamilnad, traditionally sixty-three in number, were Appar, Sambandha, Sundaramurti and Manikka Vachakar. The *Tiruvachakam* of the latter is the high-water mark of early Tamil Saivite poetry. Although a Brahmin by birth, the boy saint Sambandha used to go from village to village singing his inspired songs, accompanied by an untouchable musician and his wife whom he had accepted as disciples. Both the Saiva and the Vaishnava *bhaktas* also developed their own elaborate philosophical systems, which gave strength to their organizations. Ramanuja, the great Vaishnava teacher of South India during the eleventh century, gave to Vaishnavism a firm philosophical basis, described as "qualified non-dualism" in contrast to Sankara's monism, and he also organized the Vaishnavas of India into seventy-four dioceses and appointed a pious householder as the head of each.

The spirit of *bhakti*, or the worship of one Lord, pervaded the whole of India and found vivid and beautiful expression in the fervid religious poetry of the medieval saints and mystics, no matter what particular brand of faith they professed. Their literary compositions had the effect of uniting the people in their inner life, as nothing else could have done. At the same time, they greatly stimulated the development of the regional languages of India, which increasingly began to replace Sanskrit.

In Maharashtra, over a period of five hundred years between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, many saints arose, including Jnaneswara, Namadeva, Ekanath, Tukaram and Ramdas. Namadeva was originally a tailor and Tukaram the son of a ruined Sudra grain-merchant. It was the genius of these saints,

especially Jnaneswara, which largely shaped the Marathi language. Krishna was widely worshipped as Vithoba throughout Maharashtra, but the real message of the Marathi saints inculcated the mystic love of the God who resides in the hearts of all.

The reformist Saivite sect of the Vira-Saivas, or Lingayats, who broke with the system of caste, sacrifice, images and pilgrimages, was founded in the western Deccan by Basava about the middle or end of the twelfth century and produced a large number of Kannarese lyricists. In Kashmir, in the fourteenth century, the woman Saiva saint Lalla Yogiswari went about half-naked, dancing and singing in Kashmiri her pungent verses on the theme of divine unity. Narsimha Mehta sang of Krishna in Gujarati, in the fifteenth century. The Vaishnavas under the Vijayanagar kings of the sixteenth century found many Telugu and Kannarese poets as well as Sanskrit poets to sing on their behalf. As the whole of India was burning with the flame of religious devotion, only the absence of poets to give expression to it would have been unusual.

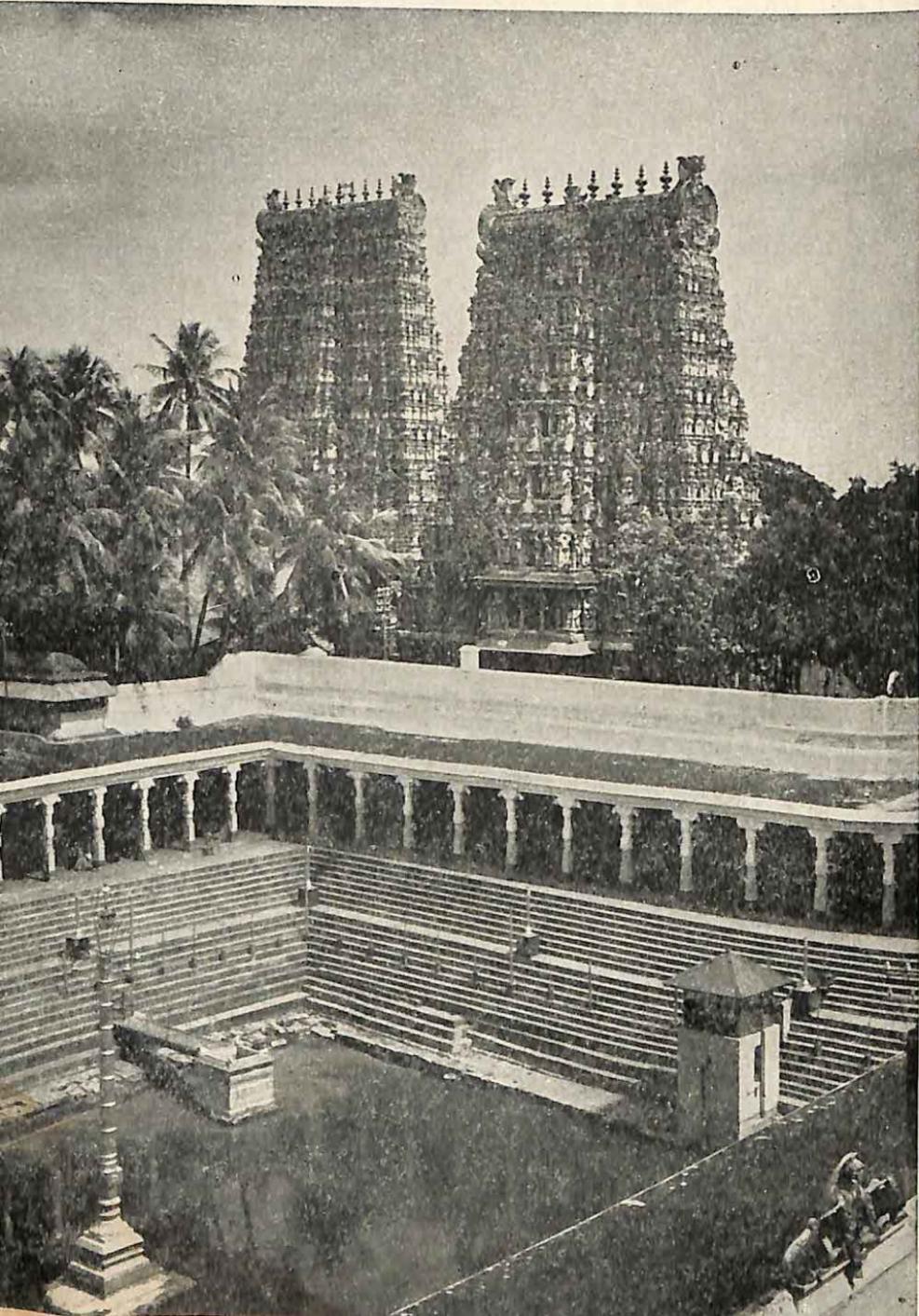
Medieval Bengal deserves special mention for its religious poets and saints. Except for Jayadeva, the great Vaishnava poet of the second half of the twelfth century, whose master-piece was in Sanskrit (the *Gita-Govinda*, which describes Radha's love for Krishna), most of the poets made use of their Bengali mother-tongue to arouse an atmosphere surcharged with passionate love for the Supreme Being. All sects flourished side by side in Bengal—Buddhism, surviving in a late form after it had perished everywhere else in India, Vaishnavism, Saivism, and above all, Saktism. The Saktas worshipped the Supreme as the Mother of the Universe, the active Female Principle. Hers was the realm of the *gunas* and the world of *maya*, and Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were subordinate to her. The Saktas observed special *tantric* mysteries and rites, primarily designed to awaken, with the help of the Guru, the coiled-up power known as the *kundalini* that resides in every individual. Ultimately, to a lesser or greater degree, Saktism influenced all other religious sects in Bengal—even Vaishnavism—and it was sometimes difficult to make any clear distinction between the sects.

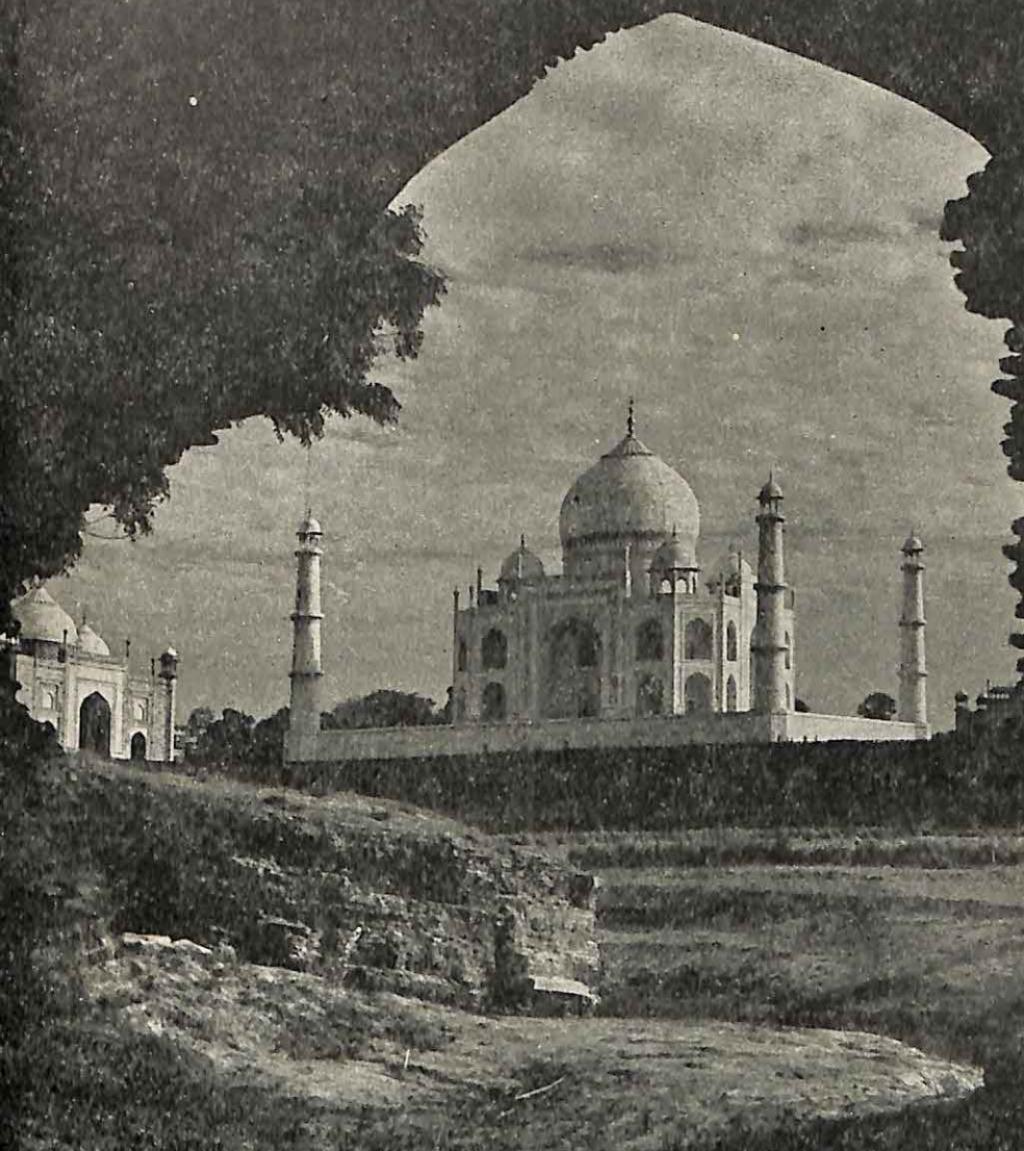
Many of the eighty-four miracle-working *siddhas* (some of whom seem to have been real persons living in the twelfth century) were claimed equally by Saivas and Buddhists. In the



*Siva Nataraja*  
Bronze from Tanjore (12th century A.D.)

*Pool of the Golden Lotus*  
Meenakshi Temple, Madurai (17th century A.D.)





*Taj Mahal at Agra*  
White marble tomb of Mumtaz Mahal built by the Mughal  
Emperor Shah Jahan (17th century A.D.)



*The Saint Kabir with a disciple*  
*A painting of the Mughal School*

fourteenth century Chandidas, excommunicated as a Brahmin because of his idealistic love for the washerwoman Rami, became a member of the esoteric Buddhist Sahajia sect, but at the same time his feelings were those of an ardent Vaishnava. He went about the villages singing his famous lyrical compositions on the Radha-Krishna theme, which are as popular today as they were in his own time. Still another Radha-Krishna poet was the polished Vidyapati, a late contemporary of Chandidas and, properly speaking, a Maithili, but his poetry in translation was even more appreciated in Bengal than in his native Bihar. Finally, there was Chaitanya, the greatest Vaishnava saint of Bengal, born towards the end of the fifteenth century. Though no authentic verses of his are known, his adoration of Radha-Krishna, expressed through tears, ecstatic dancing and *sankirtan*, drew thousands of followers wherever he went, for his was a love which embraced all mankind. Nor were the Saktas lacking in impassioned poets. The *Chandi* of Kavikankan (Mukundaram Chaturvedi), dating from the sixteenth century, and Ram-prasad's innumerable songs of the eighteenth century, addressed to Syama, or Kali, as the Divine Mother, are a household inspiration of millions of Bengalis today.

Naturally the rest of northern India also had its great spiritual teachers and inspired poets, whose function it was to give the people hope, strength and inner courage at precisely the time when Muslim conquest was creating an unparalleled political and social upheaval. Here the *bhakti* movement found many dynamic Hindi interpreters. Two of them, both belonging to the sixteenth century, whose songs about Krishna captured the hearts of all listeners, were Surdas, the blind temple musician of Agra, and Mirabai, the famous Rajput princess. Surdas, a disciple of Vallabha, composed no fewer than 60,000 Hindi verses on the Krishna story. Mirabai, who was a daughter-in-law of Rana Sanga, was apparently widowed in her youth, when her husband, Raja Bhoj, most probably lost his life in the Rajput battles against Babar in 1527. But she found solace in ecstatic devotion to her Beloved, and her rapturous songs of Krishna, equally familiar in Rajasthani, Gujarati and Hindi, are one of the great treasures of Indian music and literature.

While Krishna worshippers from the time of Chaitanya continued to identify the vital centre of their faith with the childhood

home of the Divine Cowherd of Vrindavan, millions of Vaishnavas in northern India were turning towards the love of Rama, rather than Krishna, as a result of the teachings of Ramananda, and the influence of Tulsidas, the greatest of Hindi poets.

Ramananda was born in or near Banaras about the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was a follower of the Vaishnava school of Ramanuja, and a Sanskrit scholar of repute. He showed his independence of thought in the strong opposition to sectarianism and rites, in his choice of Rama as the highest Incarnation of the Lord, and in his desire to have his disciples adopt Hindi, instead of Sanskrit, to propagate the Vaishnava teachings. Moral and ethical conduct were insisted upon by him as the surest way of obtaining the grace of spiritual salvation. He refused to recognize social inequalities and even the barriers of different religions, accepting among his direct disciples a cobbler, a barber, a Jat peasant and a Muslim weaver.

Tulsidas was so deeply influenced by Ramananda, though his time was considerably later, that he is generally considered to be at least in the indirect line of discipleship. It was he who carried the Vaishnava teachings of Ramananda into every home and village of northern India, through his great literary work in Hindi, the *Ramacharitamanasa*, begun in Banaras on March 30, 1574, according to his own statement in the text. Tulsidas made full use of Valmiki's *Ramayana* as the base for his long poem, but he glorified Rama throughout as the Personal and Supreme God, who incarnated himself out of love and compassion for the sake of suffering humanity, and he filled his verses with definite religious instructions for the people. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* sank into the consciousness of the whole of northern India, which became thoroughly saturated with it.

Quite different in expression and outlook was the most original of Ramananda's direct disciples, the Muslim weaver Kabir. Kabir was not only a saint but a stern reformer, hating religious cant and hypocrisy, as can be gathered from his terse and often caustic verses which are still sung all over Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab. Whatever the myth regarding his birth, there is no doubt that Kabir was brought up in the household of a poor Muhammadan weaver's family of Banaras, where he learned his humble trade which he continued to practise even after he had met his Guru, Ramananda. His rejection of rituals and image-

worship might well have been inspired by the tenets of orthodox Islam, and his ridicule of caste might as easily have sprung from the underlying Islamic doctrine of social democracy. But when he attacked fasts and ablutions and pilgrimages as useless performances, and found the outward insignia of religion just so much foolishness, he attacked both orthodox Islam and orthodox Hinduism. Added to this he proclaimed that Allah and Rama were names of one and the same God, that God was to be found neither in the temple nor in the mosque, neither in Banaras nor in Mecca, but only in the heart of his devotee. This was more the language of a Sufi than anything else, and in using it Kabir drew to himself both Muslim and Hindu disciples.

Sufism, indeed, was quite familiar to fifteenth century India, and Kabir must often have come in contact with wandering Sufis. Its strange mixture of unorthodox Islam, Advaita Vedanta, Arab mysticism, Persian romanticism, Greek Neo-Platonism, Nestorian Christianity, and intense *bhakti* for the formless God, attracted personalities like his, which recognized no geographical boundaries and refused to be fettered by dogma or creed. This was the language which came nearest to bridging the gulf between Hindus and Muslims in the fifteenth century. When Kabir died, so the story goes, his Muslim disciples wanted to bury his body and his Hindu disciples to cremate it. The wrangling continued until, on lifting the sheet, they found that the body of the dead saint had miraculously disappeared. Only a heap of lotus flowers remained, which the disciples reverently divided into two equal portions.

Kabir's influence extended far beyond the group of his own disciples, who soon formed themselves into the sect of Kabirpanthis which is still in existence. Practically all his teachings were accepted by his younger contemporary, Guru Nanak, and incorporated into the Sikh religion as founded by Nanak. Nanak, like Kabir, was a practical mystic. He looked upon Islam and Hinduism as two paths to God, and on ceremonial, image-worship and caste as hindrances in the path to God. His whole emphasis was on the love for One God, dwelling formless within the heart. He further proclaimed that the life of the *seholder*, earning his living by honest labour, was superior to that of the ascetic. Both Kabir and Nanak married and had children.

When Arjun, fifth in the line of Sikh Gurus, collected the writings of earlier Gurus and compiled the Adi-Granth, the sacred book of the Sikhs, in 1604, many devotional hymns of Vaishnava saints were included. Poems of Namdev and Tukaram, of Ramananda, of Kabir, and of his cobbler disciple Ravidas, all form part of the sacred Granth. But Kabir's Hindi stanzas which are included number more than a thousand, showing the great part he played in the early development of Sikhism in the Punjab, before the tenth and last Guru, Govind Singh, transformed the Sikhs into the militant community of the Khalsa, at the end of the seventeenth century.

Another saint and mystic who reflected Kabir's influence was Dadu, the cotton-cleaner of Ahmedabad, born in the middle of the sixteenth century. He breathed the same free air as Kabir, though the latter died twenty-six years before Dadu was born. In one of his psalms, Dadu says, "The illusion of Allah and Rama hath been dispelled from my mind; since I see Thee in all, I see no difference between Hindu and Turk." Once, it is said, Dadu was summoned to discuss religion for forty days with the great Mughal emperor, Akbar. A few years before Guru Arjun compiled the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, Dadu requested his disciples to gather together songs and hymns from Hindu, Islamic and Sufi sources which could help the devotee in his search for the universal God. This was perhaps the first collection of its kind in the world.

Kabir, Nanak and Dadu were all extraordinarily free spirits, with a breath of spiritual horizon and freedom from any taint of religious bigotry or sectarianism, remarkable in any age. They tried to assuage religious quarrels and did their best to bring Hindus and Muslims and all other sects together.

Akbar himself, in spite of an incessantly active life as soldier, administrator and emperor of India, was remarkably in tune with the spirit of universalism as expressed by Indian mystics of the sixteenth century. He would have liked to find the spiritual bond to make all men brothers, not merely those within the fold of Islam. He sent for mean of every sort of religious persuadham Sunni, Sufi, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Christian—and in the *Ibadakhana*, in his red palace at Fatehpur Sikri, he listened through long nights to their animated discussions and arguments, during which each attacked the other's faith and passionately

defended his own. Akbar did not find what he sought, and his attempt to found a new synthetic religion, with himself as the spiritual head, failed rather pathetically. Nor did any of his successors share his questing spirit. Tolerance in administration, as well as in religion, ceased to be a characteristic of later Mughal rule. And under the British Raj which replaced it, the new rulers were too remote in thought from the Indian people even to have any wish to enter into their inner life.

At last, after the long hiatus, India is again free to set about creating a new synthesis in her national life, a synthesis which must assuredly take into account not only the religious ideals and cultural traditions of the long past, but the changing social and economic conditions of today, and the emerging needs of the future.

## CHAPTER V

### MODERN SYNTHESIS

There is nothing in Indian tradition opposed to religious, social, educational and economic reforms. It has been shown how one great religious leader after another, from the time of the Buddha onwards, stepped forward to deny, by his own living example, the supposed sanctity of orthodox rules and customs which did injury to the spirit or soul of man. During the long period of foreign subjection, many changes were forced upon India, and some of these have now been accepted as part of the national mode of life. As the feeling of bitterness dies away, it is possible to view the trying period of both the Muhammadan and British conquests in a fresh perspective, and to discover that the foreigners also, in many ways, consciously and unconsciously, helped India to prepare for the necessary transition from a medieval to a modern State.

Like Buddhism of old, both Islam and Christianity offered ways of social escape from too oppressive caste regulations. Within Islam, all followers of the Prophet were considered equal, and a man had the opportunity to rise to any position he had the capacity to fill. Even Muslim slaves, through their own inherent ability, became mighty rulers of India. Naturally, many conversions to Islam, particularly from among the lower Hindu classes, took place during the period of Muslim domination. The democratic spirit of Islamic society was further manifested in the Quranic injunction for the regular collection of *zakat*, a religious tax on the rich for the benefit of the poor and needy. The unorthodox Sufi doctrines, which had much in common with the free spirit of Vedanta and *bhakti*, also did something to lessen religious antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims of a certain type. Later, under the British, Western democratic ideas gained wide currency. The new schools opened by Christian missionaries, though favouring conversion to Christianity, imparted modern knowledge, and they particularly filled the vacuum in regard to the education of girls and those to whom the privileges of education had been totally denied. The building of hospitals was among

their other humanitarian activities and it answered a universal need and benefited the country as a whole.

Material and industrial development, even in the interests of British investors, automatically helped to break down social prejudices. Water piped to cities and towns, the introduction of municipal sanitation, public transport systems in which anyone who bought a ticket was entitled to a seat in a train, bus or tram, the mills and factories in which the dead hand of tradition was helplessly unable to decree the caste of a man operating modern machinery, newspapers, the spread of English education, the speeding up of world communications, the dissemination of the concept of political democracy, and a measure of democratic institutions grudgingly introduced into India in response to the growing demand towards the close of British rule, all inevitably tended to loosen fixed habits and customs. Many far-sighted Indians arose who saw the necessity for a profound change in the political, social and economic outlook of the people, if India was to regain her place among the great nations of the world.

One of the earliest of this vanguard of modern thinkers was Ram Mohan Roy. Born in a Bengali Brahmin family, he had already made up his mind by the age of seventeen that popular Hinduism needed a thorough overhauling. His Sanskrit study of the Upanishads confirmed his faith in one formless Supreme Deity, and he vigorously began to oppose image-worship and sought to free Hindu society from its dependence on the offices of priests. In his eager pursuit of knowledge, he became a great student of languages, acquiring mastery over Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English, Urdu, Greek and Hebrew, apart from his own Bengali. His first published work, characteristically enough, was a treatise in monotheism, written in Persian, with an introduction in Arabic.

Although he took service under the East India Company still ruling Bengal, he carried on a continuous campaign to end rampant social abuses and bring about a general reawakening in India. He bitterly attacked the cruel practice of Sati—self-immolation of widows—much in vogue in Bengal in his time, and showed by citation of ancient texts that it had no scriptural injunction, as many pretended. Thus encouraged by his able support, Lord William Bentinck, then Governor-General of India, finally abolished the practice by law, in 1829. Ram Mohan Roy also worked untiringly for the freedom of press and speech, and for education

in the English language, so that Indians might acquire, as rapidly as possible, modern scientific knowledge. He urged the rights of female inheritance, advocated monogamous marriage, and fought for the legal rights of the rack-rented peasants of Bengal against the landlords. He founded journals, and schools, in one of which Debendranath Tagore, father of the poet Rabindranath, became a student. In 1830, he opened in Calcutta a temple of universal faith, in fulfilment of his religious ideal. The temple, which was to be a place of public meeting and worship, "strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds," was the start of the religious reform movement known as the Brahmo Samaj, of which Debendranath Tagore became the second leader and Keshub Chandra Sen the third.

Toward the end of 1830, Ram Mohan Roy went to England. He was the first high-caste Hindu to go abroad in modern times. There was to be an appeal against the Sati Act to the King-in-Council, on the ground that it was an unwarranted interference with the Hindu religion, and he wanted to present a counter-petition to the House of Commons to prove that this pernicious custom had nothing whatever to do with religion. The Charter of the East India Company was also due for renewal, and he proposed to present arguments for enlarging the fundamental rights of the Indian people. In both objects he succeeded, before he fell ill and died in Bristol, in 1833. For his wide learning, his fearlessness, his humanitarianism and his patriotism, Ram Mohan Roy won lasting respect for India among foreign intellectuals, and left a deep impress on his compatriots at home.

A very different type of leader, the stormy Lokamanya, "honoured of the people", B. G. Tilak, next began to rock India with his uncompromising demand for political freedom. Tilak was born and grew up in the period immediately following the unsuccessful Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. This left a great wave of resentment and bitterness in its wake, and to Tilak, a Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin, the method of direct action seemed the only solution. Taking Sivaji as a shining example of daring resourcefulness, he sought to awaken in Maharashtrians the memory of their past glory. On the occasion of a Sivaji festival which he organized in 1895, he stirred his hearers to frenzied excitement when he made the resounding declaration, "God has conferred on the foreigners no grant of Hindustan inscribed on imperishable

brass". He supported a revival of orthodox Hinduism as a counterblow to the growing Westernism, and in the columns of his Marathi journal, *Kesari*, constantly and ruthlessly attacked the foreign ruler. The revolutionary movement, thus inaugurated, spread to Bengal, which thereafter took the lead, for three decades, in violent anti-British activities.

Back in 1895, an Englishman, Allan Hume, had founded the Indian National Congress as a forum for Indian intellectuals to get together and pass resolutions in favour of mild constitutional reforms. Tilak joined the Congress, but was dissatisfied with its endless discussions and pious resolutions, which were without any binding consequences. Instead, he urged a Swadeshi movement and a boycott of British goods. When the Congress met at Surat in 1907 for its annual session, Tilak's proposal for the immediate launching of a movement of direct action created an uproar, and a serious split in the Congress ranks occurred. Tilak and his followers withdrew, leaving the field to the Moderates. But a considerable following among the millhands of Bombay, as well as other Extremist elements in the country had already been won over to Tilak's side. He rejoined the Congress in 1916, but for the remaining four years of his life worked for self-government for India as a free partner in the British Empire.

Another great son of India in the nineteenth century was Swami Vivekananda. His short life was devoted, not to political agitation, but to helping India regain her lost faith in herself, and insisting that she put her own house in order. With a lion's roar, he called upon India to shake off lethargy, weakness and petty jealousies, which were the stigma of slavery, and rise to her full stature of greatness. As a student in Calcutta, he first joined the Brahmo Samaj, but his dynamic personality required something more vital than the Samaj doctrines of charity, morality, piety, tolerance, a rational religion and economic reforms. He wanted all these, and much more. He finally found his inspiration at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, a Brahmin priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, close to Calcutta.

Ramakrishna was born in a humble Bengal village only three years after the death of Ram Mohan Roy. He had none of the latter's brilliant intellectualism, but a passionate yearning to know God. Through a series of extraordinary experiments, in which he successively followed the prescribed disciplines not only of all the

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main Hindu sects and of Advaita Vedanta, but of Christianity and Islam also, he came to the personal realization that all religions lead to the same goal. Therefore, he denounced nothing. He did not ask Hindus to give up any of their established religious practices, or Christians their Christianity, or Muslims Islam. All religions he held to be phases of the one Eternal Religion, so many paths to God, which are followed by people according to their tendencies and inclinations. Many years later, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face." Coming in touch with the saint of Dakshineswar at the impressionable age of eighteen, mind and heart completely captivated, the future Vivekananda became his chief disciple. After Ramakrishna's death in 1886, Vivekananda bound the little band of his brother disciples together as an order of Sannyasis, and from this beginning grew the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, with branches all over India as well as in many foreign countries today.

With prophetic vision, Vivekananda probed deep into India's needs. For years he walked the length and breadth of the country as a homeless wanderer, and came to understand the condition of the people as few have done. He found the nation drained of vigour, not through the fault of the Hindu religion, as some of the Westernized reformers were maintaining, but because of those who, having knowledge, had failed to share it with the people. "I consider that the great national sin", he wrote, "is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall." He saw clearly that the days of exclusive privileges and claims on the part of the so-called higher castes were ending, but the solution of India's misery and degradation, he believed, was not to bring down the higher, but to raise the lower.

Let men go to the villages with microscopes and globes and magic lanterns—films and television were not then invented—and give the people the benefit of modern education, but something more than a mass of undigested information. Give them a life-making, man-making, character-making education, so that they could work out their own salvation. What India needed was practical Vedanta, combined with the democratic body of Islam and the heart of a Buddha. Let religion be expressed in the living

worship of "the only God that exists... the sum-total of all souls... my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species." One can hear the anguish in his cry, "I do not believe in a God or religion that cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth."

He was equally against rank materialism and arrant superstition. "Cease to look upon every little village superstition as a mandate of the Vedas", he ordered. Treat the Muslims as brothers. Be prepared to learn from all nations, as well as to share with them India's wonderful spiritual heritage. Enfranchise the women, and let them be the shapers of their future destiny. Open schools and orphanges and hospitals all over the country. "Where is the money?... Where are the men? That is the question." "The whole world has been made by the energy of man, by the power of enthusiasm, by the power of faith." He called upon his countrymen to develop muscles of iron, nerves of steel and minds like the thunderbolt. "Go all of you", he thundered, "wherever there is an outbreak of plague or famine, or wherever the people are in distress, and mitigate their sufferings. At the most, you may die in the attempt. What of that?"

Such was the invigorating message of Vivekananda, and he could truly say on his return from a long visit to Europe and America, whither he had gone in 1893 to speak on behalf of Vedanta at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, "Bold has been my message to the West. Bolder to those at home." What he called his plan of campaign, laid down sixty years ago, is almost identical with India's present programme of social reform and education.

One of the supermen Vivekananda was seeking was already there, slowly preparing himself for the immense work ahead. But the two never met. Gandhiji, the young barrister, sailed from Bombay for South Africa in 1893, at almost the same moment when Vivekananda, the yet unknown monk, sailed for America. When Gandhiji at last returned to take up his work in India, in 1915, Vivekananda had already been dead thirteen years.

Gandhiji is still so close to us that it is scarcely necessary to review the well-known details of his life. His towering personality fits into no conventional pattern. Though a politician of the first rank, he was deeply religious, and though religious, a tireless worker. After having made his early "experiments with truth"

in South Africa, where he tried out and perfected his technique of non-violent non-cooperation as political weapon to obtain justice for the oppressed community of Indian settlers who had made Africa their home, he was ready to apply his technique in India. In the end, the mighty British Raj had to yield to his novel method of persuasion, and under the banner of non-violent non-cooperation, with a minimum of bloodshed, Gandhiji led India, in a clean fight, to political freedom.

Gandhiji's uniqueness was in his character. He refused to hate anyone. Even while he fought the British Government, he continued to love Englishmen. Hindu-Muslim unity was a passionate article of faith with him, and for this he ultimately sacrificed his life. He was absolutely fearless and absolutely above board. He never failed to tell his opponents in advance of the precise weapon he intended to use on the morrow, such as the defiance of some forbidden regulation which would inevitably mean his own imprisonment. He never asked anyone to do what he would not do himself, but he demanded of his followers implicit obedience. His sense of humour, his delight in children, his uniform courtesy to all, were among the qualities most endearing to his associates. He was austere simple in his habits.

All the time he was waging his war of non-cooperation against the British, he was relentlessly attacking social abuses masquerading under the name of Hinduism, which he considered wrong, and insisting on a change of heart on the part of Hindus. All ideas of high and low, he insisted, had to go. The untouchables he renamed Harijans, "men of God", and he even cleaned latrines and made his followers do so, to demonstrate that no work should be looked upon as impure. He opposed child marriage, urged education for girls, asked women to come out from their seclusion and take their proper part in social and national activities. (They came by the thousand!) He worked ceaselessly for the revival of the stagnant villages of India and the dying handicrafts. As an immediate means of relieving the appalling poverty, he engineered the boycott of foreign cloth and popularized the general use of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, thus saving huge sums from going out of the country and restoring employment to idle spinners and weavers, besides adding a subsidiary means of livelihood for the village family. Finally, by his example, he

made the ideal of a life of service for others a living reality, for he identified himself with the poor and downtrodden.

He himself, as everyone knows, wore the scantiest of clothing, travelled third class, repeatedly took long exhausting walks, for months at a time, through the villages in different parts of the country, lived on a few annas a day, made a mud-walled, thatched hut his only home. And when, on January 30, 1948, less than six months after India became free, he fell a victim to the assassin's bullet, all his worldly possessions could be gathered up into one small bundle. Such was the Father of the Nation.

Although Gandhiji was the outstanding figure in the national freedom movement, innumerable other valiant workers, both before and after him, contributed their share to the fulfilment of the long struggle. From every part of the country, from every religious group, from every social level, selfless workers sprang up. It is fitting to recall the names of giants who are no longer here. Some, in the earlier days, fought in principle along constitutional lines, like Dadabhai Naoroji, G. K. Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Tej Bahadur Sapru. Some like Pheroze Shah Mehta, Ranade, Dayananda Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (whose "Bande Mataram" is one of India's national songs), Rabindranath Tagore, Bharati and Prem Chand, threw their energies into social, religious, educational and literary activities of national significance. Others, before the dominant emergence of Gandhiji, joined or supported the early revolutionary party and lived dangerously, ready to throw down their lives at a moment's notice, like Bipin Chandra Pal, the young Sri Aurobindo and his brother Barin Ghose, and Bhagat Singh or their later successors of the Extremist wing of the Congress Party, C. R. Das and Netaji Subhas Bose, for instance.

The greater number of leaders, however, threw themselves whole-heartedly into Gandhiji's movement, gave up lucrative careers, and repeatedly went to jail, sometimes for years at a stretch. Those who have now joined the immortals are stalwarts like Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Jamnalal Bajaj, Sarojini Naidu, Vallabhbhai Patel, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, R. A. Kidwai, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Acharya Narendra Deo, Govind Ballabh Pant, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Jawaharlal Nehru.

As for the rest, the greater part are in the service of free India, either in the Government or outside. Among those outside the Government are Acharya Kripalani, Jaya Prakash Narain and C. Rajagopalachari, or in another category all his own, Vinoba Bhave, busy with his collection of land gifts on behalf of the landless poor. There are also countless workers as anonymous as those authors, painters and sculptors who were the makers of ancient Indian culture, who have left no name behind them, asked for no personal recognition and received none.

Fortunately, India can now look back on a long history of experimentation and practical application in life of a wide variety of ideas. An intense interest in ideas and a willingness to see them pursued to their logical conclusion has, indeed, always characterized the Indian outlook. Modifications, required by the changed political status and objectives of free India, in old mental attitudes and habits should cause no serious difficulty, provided, of course, that the fundamentals of Indian culture are not violated. Real values have to be distinguished from the froth of novelty for novelty's sake, and from dead rituals, customs and vested interests which have now outgrown their usefulness. In other words, political freedom has to be consolidated through the intelligent and enthusiastic co-operation of the people in carrying out necessary reforms and in working for the fulfilment of the manifold schemes of development.

What are the outstanding objectives before the country today? They can be summed up as maintaining political freedom, ensuring to the Indian people opportunities for a better and fuller life, spiritually, intellectually, physically and materially, and contributing to international peace and goodwill. All the major problems of new India can be grouped under one or another of these heads.

The first question, the maintenance of political freedom, depends on external policy, effective defence and internal security. A good deal is heard about India's foreign policy these days. Put very simply, it is an independent policy of non-alignment with either of the two great antagonistic power blocs which have tended to tear the world asunder since the last war. This policy is in line with India's best traditions in the past. As long as India was mistress of her own destiny, she rarely indulged in aggression, but cultivated friendly relations with all countries. India is, there-

fore, opposed to being dragged into another possible world war of general destruction, especially when she feels that she has no personal quarrel with either of the two sides. But in adopting a policy of non-alignment, India reserves the right to judge each international issue on its own merits and act accordingly, if action is called for.

An extension of this approach is found in her unqualified disapproval of the continuation of colonialism and racial discrimination anywhere in Asia and Africa, and in her sympathy for the people fighting these evils. India particularly resents the virulent discriminatory treatment meted out to both Indians and the native population in the Union of South Africa.

Relations with Pakistan have remained strained since partition. It was unfortunate that India's proposal of a no-war pact as a preliminary step towards easing tensions was not acceptable to Pakistan. Nevertheless, India has tenaciously adhered to her policy of peaceful negotiation for the settlement of outstanding problems with Pakistan, including the vexed question of Kashmir. The approach has, in some measure, been vindicated. In the years 1959 and '60, India went into a number of conferences with Pakistan at various levels. As a result, agreements were arrived at on a few issues, like the exchange of border enclaves, border trade, etc. These apart, the agreement reached on the sharing of the Indus waters, a question which had dragged on for years, has been a major landmark in Indo-Pakistan relations. As the area of differences is getting reduced, there is growing renewal of the mutual consciousness of a common history and culture.

A major challenge to India's policy of peaceful co-existence has come from China which has claimed and in fact occupied large chunks of Indian territory along her long northern border. The India-China boundary has been defined by treaty or international agreements or recognized by custom and usage. India has had many centuries of peaceful relationship with China. No Chinese Government had disputed the customary boundary, except the present Government, and that too not until recently. Therefore the Chinese action has come as a deep shock to the Indian people who took for granted China's friendship and peaceful intentions towards India. India is not averse to minor rectifications of the northern border through mutual negotiation, but

repudiates China's claims to vast areas in uttar disregard of the natural Himalayan features and well-established facts of history.

Without entering into an arms race with any other nation, considerable progress has been made in military self-sufficiency. Those responsible for the safety of the country have also been able to create, for the first time in Indian history, a truly national defence force on an all-India basis. The old artificial "military" and "non-military" categories have been done away with. Every Indian, physically fit and possessing the required mental standards and aptitudes, is eligible to join any branch of the services today.

In the new set-up, the idea of service to the people receives prominent emphasis. Indian troops in Kashmir voluntarily shared their rations with refugees. When emergencies like earthquake, flood, famine or drought occur, whether it be in Assam, Bihar, Madras or Andhra, India's armed forces make a vanguard of relief work. The voluntary National Cadet Corps and the Territorial Army, with their auxiliary branches, are providing elementary military training for thousands of young men and hundreds of girls, infusing into them a new spirit of discipline and service. Training includes participation in annual Social Service, and members have a record of fine work connected with the Community Projects, road-building, the clearing of drains, the repairing of dams and many similar acts of voluntary service for the people.

This is a new conception of military service. Conventional ideals of loyalty to the country, honour, military discipline and courage on the battle-field still stand as indispensable, but service to the Motherland in every way has now been accepted as a part of military training. India is very proud of her regular armed forces, her National Cadet Corps and her Territorial Army.

The question of internal stability, however, still gives some cause for anxiety because of newly-awakened local and group loyalties. These are growing at the expense of a truly national outlook, and the inevitable struggle for political power has begun to come to the fore. Immediately after political freedom, the great work of peacefully bringing the hundreds of semi-autocratic States into the scheme of a unified democratic administration was almost miraculously achieved. During that crucial phase, India might well have foundered on the rock of administrative chaos, but thanks to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first Home Minister in

the new regime, the political integrity of the country was assured. A new danger arose in the demand for reorganization of the States on the basis of regional language, religion or majority group. Happily the threat to unity was overcome, and the reorganized States came into being in November 1956. The linguistic controversies attending the process of reorganization have served to underline the need for evolving gradually a common language as a means of cementing Indian unity.

For common communication in the past, four languages, each with its own separate script, have historically served as official languages. They were the monumental Prakrit of Asoka's time; Sanskrit, India's great religious and literary language for more than a thousand years; Persian, declared the court language under Akbar; and English, substituted for Persian in 1836. Now Hindi, India's fifth official language, is to take the place of English for all inter-State communications.

Many would like to see Sanskrit come back as the all-India language. Others would prefer to retain English because of its position as a useful world language today. It is hoped that both will remain in India as specialized subjects of study. But the fact has to be faced that Sanskrit is not only a very difficult language, but is no longer a spoken language in the India of today. It was replaced by the dozen regional languages of modern India as many as eight centuries ago. To attempt to reverse a fundamental trend is like trying to swim against the current. English, on the other hand, is a foreign language, and it is not in keeping with India's position as a free and independent country to continue to impose English on the country as the national language. The alternative is Hindi, in the Devanagari script. Hindi is more or less well understood by over 42 per cent of India's population. In deciding upon Hindi, no petty considerations of favouritism influenced those who had to make the choice, and there should be no feeling of jealousy against Hindi in any part of the country.

Primary education is henceforth to be given in the regional language or mother tongue, but Hindi is everywhere to be taught in the secondary stage of education. Many countries of the world are bilingual, as a force of circumstances, and the mastery of Hindi in India will become feasible for the school-going population within a generation. At the same time, a healthy

development of all the regional languages, from a literary point of view, is to be encouraged, with translation of important works from one language into another.

The constructive programme for social and economic advance, made obligatory under the Directive Principles embodied in the Indian Constitution, forms the positive side of the plan for the transformation of India into a genuine Welfare State. The purpose is to raise the standard of living of the millions, woefully forgotten and long sunk in poverty and ignorance, so that ultimately they, too, may make their own vital contributions to New India. Many measures to this end have already been taken, while others are in the process of being implemented as part of India's Five Year Plans. No aspect of India's national life will remain untouched by the vast programme of all-round development, which aims to combine what is best in old Indian traditions and values with economic techniques and with the responsibility for social welfare which is inseparable from the concept of a modern State. Here is the real Indian revolution, then, supplementing and fulfilling the non-violent political revolution by which freedom was won less than two decades ago.

It is impossible to give more than the barest outline of some of the tremendous changes now being effected in the country. Among these, the special measures which have been undertaken for the advancement of certain sections of the population are basic to the process of all-round social integration which is now being consciously fostered. These relate to the former "untouchables", women, and the vast tribal population.

The Indian Constitution abolished "untouchability", but not content with this declaration against a practice which in the past had degraded and inhibited the growth of millions, subsequently made its practice in any form an offence punishable under the law. Under the provisions of the Constitution steps are being taken by all the States for the advancement of the backward classes and for the promotion of their economic, educational and social interests. Seats are reserved for them in the legislatures, and appointments in the services. The universities, colleges and schools have, year after year, an increasing number of Harijan boys and girls on their rolls. These aspects apart, the very right of adult franchise has placed in the hands of the "untouchables" and the backward classes the power and initiative to sponsor revolutionary social

and economic programmes. The backward classes are finding increasing representation in the country's legislatures and other elected bodies, particularly in the village councils which represent the grass-roots of the Indian democracy. It was singularly appropriate, from a moral point of view, that the Indian Constitution was piloted by the late B. R. Ambedkar, an "untouchable" himself.

An attempt is being made to render justice to another great section of the population, namely, women. India's Republican Constitution bestowed on women the right of equality of status and opportunities. And in the decade that has followed, far-reaching social legislation in regard to women's rights of marriage, divorce and inheritance has been undertaken. Under the Hindu Code Bill, monogamy was enforced; men and women given equal rights of divorce; the limited estate of women was extended to one of absolute control of their property; and the daughter is entitled to her due share of the parents' property. The Special Marriage Act gave Indian women the right for contract of marriage by registration. A distinctive feature of the women's movement in India in the years after freedom is its emphasis on equal as distinguished from special rights. What is being increasingly claimed is a free field and no favours. There is no avenue now closed to them. Women now sit in the Union Parliament, in State legislatures, in the Central and State Cabinets, and in public bodies and are the makers of the country's policies. Indian women are showing exemplary leadership not only in the home and family, but in politics, education, social work, economic programmes, and in the fields of literature and the fine arts. Indeed, the most hopeful feature of the Indian social revolution is the pace of women's advance and their growing partnership in nation-building.

In regard to the tribal people, who number more than 10 millions, India's policy has been to give them opportunity for self-development, without interfering in their way of life. India has approached this problem with sympathy and respect. Under foreign rule, the tribes were largely left alone, but after Independence India has endeavoured to bring them closer to the rest of the Indian people. The administrative machinery in the tribal areas has changed from a law and order concern to a welfare agency, with devolution of local autonomy. It is thus that the predominantly tribal areas like the North-East Frontier Agency

and the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area have been placed on a special footing for purposes of administration and development. The latter has been constituted into a full-fledged State of the Indian Union, in accordance with the wishes of the people. While the tribal people are encouraged to develop according to their genius and attain a higher standard of living, their traditional customs and cultural expressions continue unhindered. Their music, dance forms and their valuable crafts are being popularized in other parts of India. Indeed, the colourful dances presented by the tribes prove to be the most popular items during the annual Republic Day festival in India's capital. India is giving the tribal people all opportunities to develop their cultural and economic life and share fully in the larger life of the nation.

Another problem connected with social integration which has received continuous attention is the rehabilitation of the mass of refugees from Pakistan. In the years after partition over eight million people, deprived of their homes and all they possessed, poured into India from the two wings of Pakistan. This created stupendous problems, and the resettlement of these dispossessed millions who had elected to throw in their lot with India has been a signal achievement.

Side by side with these attempts at national consolidation, India has undertaken a great reform measure calculated to change the pattern of land ownership. This is of the utmost importance to the well-being of the people and to the country's economy. As in other Asian countries, India's land system was characterized by the smallness of holdings, uneven distribution and harsh exactions from the tiller. The broad approach to this problem has, therefore, been to eliminate these features and move to the principle of "land to the tiller". Intermediaries on the land have now been mostly abolished with wide popular support, and the tillers given the right to acquire ownership rights. Tenants' rights are now protected; and ceilings are being fixed, however with due care for preventing uneconomic fragmentation.

Yet, the greatest bond that is bringing the people of India together in a common partnership, as never before, is being forged through the nation's economic efforts.

The problems which confronted India on the attainment of freedom were common to all under-developed countries—mass

poverty, a low standard of living, slums, disease, illiteracy and mass idleness.

India's Five Year Plans are intended to solve these problems as speedily as possible, and open to the people opportunities for a richer and fuller life. India intends to do this through democratic partnership of the people, without conflict and coercion.

India's first Five Year Plan was launched in April 1951. It was essentially a preparatory venture, the first start towards growth from the long stagnation. The Plan was also to initiate the basic economic and social policies under the Directive Principles of the Constitution, "to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all institutions of national life." India's immediate needs were: increased agricultural and food output; irrigation and power to help her predominantly peasant community, and to stimulate the growth of large and small industries; and the development of transport and communications to open up the rural areas and to meet the needs of industries and trade. These items in the aggregate claimed over 60 per cent of the actual Plan outlay of Rs. 19,600 millions.

In the field of agriculture, various measures were initiated, like reclamation of land, provision of irrigation facilities, and supply of better seeds, implements and scientific manure. As a result of all these, overall production increased by 15 per cent during the Plan period. Output of food which was 54 million tons in 1949-50 rose to 65 million tons in 1955-56. A number of giant multi-purpose river valley projects were launched in different parts of the country, among which were the Bhakra, the Damodar Valley Project, the Hirakud, the Tungabhadra and the Mayurakshi. Some of them were completed, while others were continuing schemes. These, together with the large number of minor schemes undertaken all over the country, extended irrigation to vast tracts cultivable area. During the period, power production rose from 2.3 million kw. to 3.4 million kw. Several State-owned industrial projects, like the Sindri Fertilizer Factory, the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, the Integral Coach Factory, the Indian Telephone Industries, the Hindustan Cables and the Penicillin Factory were set up, and a wide range of small and medium engineering and electrical industries were started.

During the Plan, India spent about Rs. 5,300 millions on the rehabilitation, expansion and modernization of her railways, and on the development of roads, which included the extension of the national highways, construction of trunk roads and the laying of feeder and village roads. The shipping tonnage also expanded substantially.

The Plan also saw the birth and spread of the most revolutionary rural programme ever attempted in India, namely, the Community Development movement. Based on self-help and popular initiative, the aim of the programme was to inject a new dynamism into India's rural areas. It was a total plan for the villages. The first 55 development blocks were started on October 2, 1952. By the end of the first Plan the movement had covered 123,000 villages and 80 million people.

In the sphere of social services, where immense leeway was to be made up, a vigorous campaign was launched to spread literacy, to provide facilities for higher and technical education, to expand health services, and to control preventable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis etc. Science was also given its proper place in the scheme of national development. A number of national laboratories were established to speed up progress and ensure that India did not lag behind in advanced fundamental research.

Both the short-term and long-term objectives of the Plan were by and large achieved. Domestic production increased, and the economy was strengthened. National income increased by 18.4 per cent from about Rs. 88,500 millions in 1950-51 to about Rs. 104,800 millions in 1955-56. The *per capita* income recorded an increase of 10.8 per cent from Rs. 246 to Rs. 274. The rate of investment in the economy increased from 5 per cent of the national income in 1950-51 to 7 per cent by the end of the Plan.

The success of the first Plan and the direction of the social changes during the period had to a large degree determined the size and content of the second Plan (1956-1961). Its basic objectives were summed up in the expression "A Socialist Pattern of Economy". "The accent was on the raising of living standards, the enlargement of opportunities for all, the promotion of enterprises among the disadvantaged classes, and the creation of a sense of partnership among all sections of the community". From these aims followed the main lines of emphasis : the development



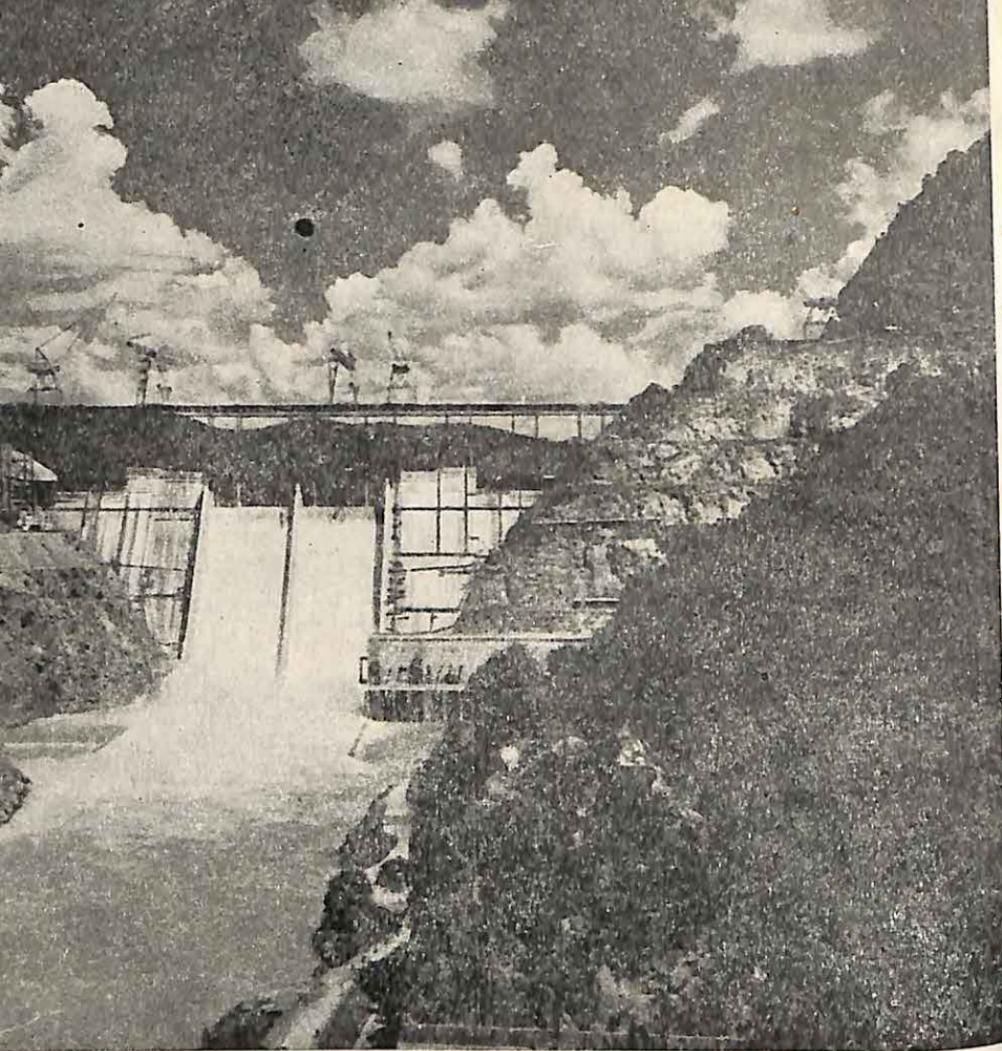
*Portrait of Emperor Akbar*



*Radha and Krishna*  
*A painting of the Kangra School (18th century A.D.)*



*Kumbh Mela at Allahabad*



*Bhakra Dam*

of basic and heavy industries to provide a solid base for industrialization and an impetus to ancillary enterprises; expansion of the public sector to make sure that "the economic system did not result in the concentration of wealth and the means of production to the common detriment" and the fostering and development of small and village industries so as to use India's vast man-power in productive enterprises. In a country where there was under-utilization of man-power, expansion of employment opportunities became an important objective in itself.

For a country like India the process of economic development involves a long and sustained effort. The first and second Plans were conceived as the first phase in the journey.

Investment during the two Plans totalled Rs. 10,110 crores—Rs. 5,210 crores in the public sector and Rs. 4,900 crores in the private sector—increasing the average annual level of investment in the economy from Rs. 500 crores at the beginning of the decade to Rs. 1,600 crores at its end.

Programmes for agriculture and irrigation took up 31 and 20 per cent of public sector outlay in the First and Second Plans, respectively. With the Second Plan shift of emphasis to industries, the share of industries and minerals was increased from 4 per cent in the First to 20 per cent in the Second Plan. For power, the allocations in the two Plans were 13 and 10 per cent. Transport and communications received equally high priority in both Plans, accounting for 27 and 28 per cent, while social services and miscellaneous items took up 23 and 18 per cent of the outlays in the First and Second Plans.

Among the noteworthy features of industrial development during the decade, 1951—61, was the progress India made in steel production. Three giant plants, Bhilai, Rourkela, and Durgapur, each with a capacity of one million tons ingot, were built and commissioned, and the older plants were expanded. India also made rapid strides in basic, capital and producer goods industries, especially in machinery and engineering industries. A beginning was made in the production of heavy electrical equipment, and the manufacture of a number of new products, like industrial boilers, milling machines and other machine tools, sulpha and antibiotic drugs, newsprint, etc., was newly established. In the field of village and small industries, for the promotion of which special measures were initiated during the Plans, remarkable

increases have been made in the production of handloom cloth, khadi, toys and a variety of handicrafts, which give employment to millions of people.

In the field of agriculture, a wide range of programmes have been implemented. A number of river valley projects have been built, hundreds of medium and minor schemes completed and a vast network of new irrigation canals established. These are already turning vast areas into smiling green fields. India's total irrigated area increased from 51.5 million acres in 1950-51 to 70 million acres in 1961. Side by side, the Indian peasants are being given the benefit of better implements, and improved agricultural methods and extension services in the villages as an integral part of the Community Development movement.

At the end of the second Plan, the Community Development movement covered nearly 400,000 villages with a population of about 200 millions.

The decade has seen considerable expansion of India's transport services. About 1,200 miles of new railways were added. The mileage of surfaced roads increased from 97,500 miles in 1950-51 to 146,000 miles in 1960-61 and the shipping tonnage from 390,000 GRT to 950,000 GRT.

In the ten years, facilities for education, health and social welfare increased substantially. The percentage of children attending school in the age group 6—11 rose from 43 in 1950-51 to 62 by 1960-61. In the field of health, the number of hospitals and dispensaries went up from 8,600 in 1950-51 to 12,600 in 1960-61.

During the first and second Plans, India laid the foundations of her scientific and technological research. The new research institutions include 20 national laboratories. India has also made appreciable headway in atomic research.

In statistical terms, during the decade 1951—61, India's national income increased by about 42 per cent and *per capita* income by about 16 per cent. Overall industrial production went up by 106 per cent and agricultural production by well over 40 per cent.

India's third Five Year Plan, 1961—66, represents a crucial phase in India's planned progress. It marks a bold advance towards a self-generating economy. Its immediate aim is : (i) to secure an increase in national income of over 5 per cent per annum,

and at the same time ensure a pattern of investment so as to sustain this rate of growth during subsequent Plan periods; (ii) to achieve self-sufficiency in foodgrains and increase agricultural production to meet the requirements of industry and exports; (iii) to expand basic industries like steel, chemicals, fuel and power, and establish machine-building capacity, so that the requirements of further industrialisation can be met within a period of ten years or so mainly from the country's own resources; (iv) to utilise to the fullest possible extent the manpower resources of the country and to ensure a substantial expansion in employment opportunities; (v) to establish progressively greater equality of opportunity and to bring about reduction in disparities in income and wealth and a more even distribution of economic power. It is hoped that national income will increase 30 per cent from Rs. 14,500 crores in 1960-61 to about Rs. 19,000 crores by 1965-66 (at 1960-61 prices); *per capita* income by about 17 per cent from Rs. 330 in 1960-61 to about Rs. 385 in 1965-66.

The total cost of the physical programmes in the Third Plan, which include certain measures in preparation for the Fourth Plan, exceeds Rs. 8,000 crores for the public sector and is Rs. 4,100 crores (estimated) for the private sector. As a result of a variety of crash measures, agricultural production is now receiving top priority. By the end of the Plan, India's net irrigated area is proposed to be expanded to 90 million acres as against 70 million acres at the end of the second Plan.

The Plan has accorded a high priority to the development of industry, power and transport which are vital for lifting the economy to a higher level and for its accelerated growth. The Bhilai Rourkela and Durgapur Plants are being expanded. The Plan also provides for a fourth steel plant at Bokaro in the Damodar Valley. India has also greatly stepped up her oil refining industry and intensified the efforts for exploration for additional crude oil, with considerable success.

In order to ensure a balanced industrial development and to utilize India's man-power resources, the Plan has made provision for large-scale assistance to village and small-scale industries. As regards power, it is proposed to double the total generating capacity.

In the sphere of transport, the railways and the roads will be further expanded. The shipping target which proposed to add

about 550,000 GRT to the existing tonnage has already been exceeded.

During the third Plan, the Community Development Programme has been extended to the entire country, and the initiative for rural development has passed to a large network of village councils or panchayats. The co-operative movement will bring all the rural families within its fold.

In regard to social services, the Plan has fully recognized their value as an incentive and a necessary condition for economic advance. Its allocations for the different heads, like health, housing, slum clearance, education, etc., are much larger than in the second Plan. The outlay on educational programmes is twice as much as in the previous Plan. The proportion of pupils to the number of children will go up. In numbers, India will be providing schooling to 60 million pupils in 1965-66 as against 41 million in 1960-61. Side by side, apart from facilities for university education, technical education, in terms of numbers, will expand six-fold. All these programmes, taken together, should be considered a sound pace of advance towards the development of human resources and skills which is a prerequisite of economic growth. India is attempting to provide a broad base to the plan of economic development, that is, through universal literacy, that every citizen in the country can be reached and communicated with, and the change can spread. At the same time, facing the threat of a rapidly expanding population which could easily defeat the higher standard of living envisioned in present planning, the Government is boldly encouraging the control of population through voluntary family planning programmes, carried out in both urban and rural areas with official support.

"At the base of these entire efforts are the various programmes for building up the country's human resources", says the third Plan. This is indeed the key to the whole approach to planning in India. In fact, the social purpose of planning, and the achievement of the aims through people's partnership are stated again and again in India's Plans. The Plans are being formulated and implemented with the fullest consent and participation of the people. It is this approach which gives a special quality to India's planning.

Apart from the over-riding needs of planning which compel the evolution of a unified outlook, there are factors in the admi-

nistrative, cultural and social spheres which are increasingly helping to promote among the people the sense of a common country and a common destiny. The regional distribution of industrial projects of all-India importance, as well as the different all-India services which have been started are conducive to the growth of a national outlook. In the cultural field, the three national Academies of letters, fine arts, and dance and drama are doing an immense service in making the people aware of a common heritage, and the process is actively aided by the large number of annual literary conferences, exhibitions, dance festivals etc., which make for co-operation and exchange of ideas between the different regions. In the cultural and emotional integration of the country, All India Radio is doing an invaluable service through its national programmes on literature, art, science etc., its *Vividh Bharati* music programme, its annual *Sangeet Sammelan* and its special broadcasts to the rural areas. The cultural movement which was a part of India's freedom struggle is steadily broadening out, with active State assistance which is a new feature, and the villages and the urban areas are coming closer in a new understanding. Many barriers have fallen, and many more are falling. Thousands of farmers, students, workers, trainees and technicians are every day travelling from one part of the country to the other, to visit the new industrial projects, factories and river valley schemes, "the temples of the new age", and are sharing the sensation of a common adventure, namely, the building up of New India.

Looking back, the picture that emerges now is far different from the position only a few years ago. The accent of change is everywhere. Nevertheless, the basic aspect of the Indian Revolution is neither the extent nor the pace of change but the manner of the new synthesis that is being achieved. It is the element of consent that provides the key to the Indian situation. The strength of Indian democracy lies in its capacity to respond to social urges.

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